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"DON'T LET THE GRASS GROW UNDER YOUR FEET!" BUFFALO BILL EXCLAIMED. "I
CAN'T GO WITH YOU, PARDS, BUT I WISH YOU GOD-SPEED."

OR,
The Cowboy's Fight for a Million.

A Romance of City and Wild West.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "COOL COLORADO," "OVERLAND
KIT," "NIMBLE NICK," "NEW ENGLAND
NED," "JOE PHENIX, THE
POLICE SPY," ETC.

CHAPTER I. IN THE RIVER.

It was night; darkness hung thick and heavy over the metropolis of the New World, and nowhere was the gloom more intense than on the waters which surround the isle of Manhattan.

The Long Island ferry-boat, which had made its way slowly through the fog, with a pro-

digious amount of whistling, was just entering its slip on the East River.

Three men stood on the forward deck by the rail.

One of them was handcuffed.

Suddenly, without the least warning, the manacled man gave a violent spring, and leaped overboard, entering the water almost headfirst.

The boat was dashing into the slip at a good rate of speed, for the tide was on the ebb, and hurrying seaward at a great rate, and the man had hardly disappeared beneath the waters when the boat glided over the spot where he had struck.

There were only a few witnesses to the scene, for the line does not carry many passengers at the hour of which we write, and from their lips a cry of horror arose, for as the desperate man—a criminal escaping from the stern grasp of Justice—had fallen directly in the way of the wheel, it seemed certain that in attempting to escape earthly justice, he had rushed headlong before the court of eternity.

Under the circumstances, no attempt could be made to discover what had become of the fugitive until the ferry-boat reached the pier. Then the detectives, who had charge of the prisoner, hurried ashore; but their search was fruitless; not the slightest trace of the fugitive were they able to discover, and so they reluctantly came to the conclusion that all their labor had been in vain; the prisoner whom they had succeeded in snaring so skillfully had, by his desperate leap, escaped from their clutches, and though the rash attempt had cost him his life, yet they did not find much consolation for their failure in the circumstance.

But the sleuth-hounds of the law were wrong in their supposition.

The man was not dead.

He was one of those desperate characters who, like the fabled cat, seemed to possess nine lives.

Cool and clear-headed, he was accustomed to calculating the chances, and was not the kind of a man to rush heedlessly to certain death.

He was a magnificent swimmer, expert in all the tricks pertaining to the art; could dive like a frog and swim like a fish, almost as well under water as on the surface.

He knew that when he leaped into the stream he would be right in the path of the wheel and made his calculations accordingly.

So, after striking the water, he went down deeply, allowing the ferry-boat to pass over him and then, to make assurance doubly sure, swam under water for fully a minute before he arose to the surface. This carried him clear of the pier line, and when he came up he was fully fifty feet seaward of the last ferry pier.

Despite the gloom he was able to ascertain this fact, for he could distinguish the light of the large lantern on the end of the pier.

An ordinary swimmer would have been sadly crippled by the handcuffs, which the fugitive could not get rid of despite all his efforts, but he was expert enough to be able to get along despite this incumbrance.

He was not attempting to swim though, contenting himself with keeping his head above water, and allowing the tide to carry him along.

And this was the reason why the detectives' careful search in the neighborhood of the piers was a failure.

At the time the fugitive was fully half a mile away, and the current, setting off-shore, had borne him well out into the stream.

The desperate man had no particular plan of escape in his mind; all that he thought of at the moment was to avoid recapture, and when he was safe from that danger, he proposed to make his way to the shore.

For fully half an hour he allowed himself to drift along without attempting to do more than to keep his head above water.

He had got out so far in the stream that he was no longer able to even make out the powerful lights on the ferry bulkheads, and when he attempted to swim toward the shore he soon found that, impeded as he was with the handcuffs, he was not able to make much progress.

"By the eternal hills!" he cried, "it would be a mighty strange thing if after all my desperate adventures in the Far West I should be doomed to perish here, drowned like a miserable rat smoked out of his hole!"

By this time a fog had rolled in from the ocean so that it was impossible to distinguish objects a dozen feet away, and the swimmer was utterly in the dark in regard to his whereabouts.

"The chances look to be about a thousand to one that I will be carried out to sea!" he muttered, hoarsely, "and then it will be 'good-bye, John,' to yours truly!"

Hardly had the words escaped his lips when he came in contact with a small dark object which rose abruptly out of the gloom.

It was a boat—an empty craft astray, was the fugitive's thought, and a thrill of joy shot through him, as with his manacled hands he grasped the gunwale.

Here was a chance for escape!

He had come directly against the stem of the boat, the best point for him to clamber into it.

Hardly had he secured a firm grip on the boat though, when his idea that the boat was adrift was quickly dispelled, for the light of a bull's-eye lantern was flashed suddenly upon his face, and a hoarse voice cried:

"Where in blazes did you come from?"

A smothered oath came from between the firm-set teeth of the fugitive, for he thought he had encountered a police patrol-boat, for that would be the only craft likely to be on the river at such an hour provided with a bull's-eye lantern.

But this suspicion only lasted for a moment, for as soon as he got a view of the man who was flashing the lantern upon him, he saw that it was no policeman, but a rough-looking fellow, dressed in a pea-jacket, and with an old cap pulled down over his eyes.

And then, when the fugitive got a good view of the man, he gave a cry of joy, for in him he recognized an old acquaintance.

"Dublin Mike, by all that's lucky!" he cried.

"Hullo—hullo! Who's it makes so free with my handle?" exclaimed the man in the boat, astonished.

"Why, don't you remember your old Colorado friend, Nick Spader?" the fugitive inquired.

It was now the other's turn to utter a cry of amazement.

"Well, now, rip me up inter fiddle-strings if I ain't flabbergasted!" exclaimed the ruffian, for such he evidently was.

"You are about the last man I expected to see in these diggin's. Whar in thunder did you spring from, and why are you sporting them bracelets?"

"I've just escaped from the hands of the police; but help me into the boat, and you shall have the yarn."

There were two others in the craft in addition to the man whom the fugitive had called Dublin Mike—rough, ill-looking fellows, who bore the jail-bird stamp on their features.

Dublin Mike assisted the fugitive to climb into the boat, and after Spader was in the craft he noticed that the oar-locks were muffled with pieces of cloth, so as to prevent the oars from making any noise when they were used, and when he noticed this he understood why he had not heard the boat approach.

"You were a-chinnin' to yourself a bit in the water, jest afore you laid hold of the boat, warn't you?" Dublin Mike asked.

"Yes, I was."

"Didn't I tell yer I heerd somethin'?" Mike demanded of the others.

"These galoots are as deaf as posts, and as they didn't heer nothin', they allowed that I must be kinder off my base when I told 'em that I heerd a man's voice and warned 'em to stop rowing and lay low, for fear we might be runnin' into a police-boat."

"They are a pair of dumb-headed roosters, and contrary as mules!"

"Well, we were right 'bout one thing; it wasn't no police-boat," responded the bigger man of the two, a surly, beetle-browed scoundrel.

"What of that?" Dublin Mike demanded. "What difference does that make? The p'int was, did I hear a voice or didn't I, eh?"

The others reluctantly admitted that he was correct in his statement.

"And you kin thank my ears for your being able to board this boat, too," Dublin Mike observed to his old friend, "for if I hadn't got the galoots to stop rowing, you wouldn't have been able to run up ag'in us. But I say, what is up, anyway? Been into a leetle trouble, I reckon, by the looks of them ornaments on yer wrists?"

Nick Spader cast a glance at the other two men as if to ask whether they could be trusted.

Dublin Mike understood the meaning of the look and hastened to assure Spader that his pals were all right.

"They kin be trusted!" he declared. "Thar ain't a jail in this hyer Eastern country that they ain't seen the inside of, and you needn't be afraid to speak."

"Yes, I got in a little scrape with the police, and, though they managed to snap the bracelets on me, yet I gave them the slip and took to the river."

"But I say, what lay are you three on and do you want a pal?"

"We are going to try and take a trick on the river to-night—the river-rat act," Dublin Mike responded.

"Thar's a coastin' schooner at anchor off Governor's Island and the capt'in has got four or five hundred chucks on board which we are going for, and if you are game, jine us!"

"I will," replied Nick Spader, promptly.

CHAPTER II.

THE RIVER RATS.

"You are jest the kind of man we want!" the ruffian exclaimed, in a tone which plainly showed how delighted he was at the unexpected meeting.

"This hyer is an old Western pal of mine," he explained, addressing the other two. "An old side-pard of mine, as we say out in Colorado, and you kin jest bet your bottom dollar that we have taken many a good trick in our time, for that is the kind of men we air!"

"Nick, let me introduce you to my two pards hyer."

"Gen'leman, this hyer is Nick Spader, familiarly called Old Nick, as rough and tough a cuss as ever came out of the wilds of the West, one of the kind of men who's good to tie to. Nick, this hyer lengthy galoot is Johnny Mock, generally called Johnny Legs, as he's a fighter and a foot-racer; t'other man is Bill Short, allers called Short Bill, a tough from Toughville, you bet!"

"Glad to meet you, gentlemen," Spader observed, in his polite, easy way, while the others ducked their heads in acknowledgment of the introduction.

"And I don't doubt that four such men as we are can do business right up to the handle," Spader continued.

"You bet!" Dublin Mike exclaimed, emphatically.

And in passing it may be remarked that the Irish name of the speaker was the only thing Irish about him, for both in speech, looks and manners, he was thoroughly American.

"Now then, boys, give way ag'in!" Dublin Mike continued.

"We have got a good half-hour's pull afore us, for the craft lies well down the bay."

"She is off for England to-morrow, and all the crew are on shore, enjoying their last night of liberty, and they will not be apt to return to the ship until pretty late."

"The captain is the only man on board, and the chances are big that we will be able to collar the ducats without much trouble."

"If we could succeed in getting on board without the captain knowing it, we could do the trick easily enough," Spader suggested.

"That is our little game!" Dublin Mike replied. "That is the reason why we muffled the oars—one reason; t'other one, so that if we happened to run anywhar near one of the police patrol-boats the blue-coats wouldn't be apt to smell us out, and put us to the trouble of answering impudent questions."

"Yes, yes, I see."

"Our game is to pull up under the bow and by means of the chains thar we will be able to get on board without any difficulty. The odds are about a hundred to one that the captain won't keep no close watch, and if we kin once git on the deck of the craft it will be mighty odd if we can't do the trick, seeing that thar is only one man ag'in' four of us."

"Oh, the chances are big that you will be able to do the trick without the least difficulty!" Spader observed.

"I suppose though that if the captain should happen to be on the alert—or should show fight after we are on board, you will 'go' for him?" Spader added.

"Oh, yes, red-hot, you bet!" Dublin Mike replied, quickly.

And the other two growled, "yes, yes," in a way which plainly indicated that they did not shrink from shedding blood.

"The chances are big that we will have a fight even if we succeed in gettling on board without the old man discovering us until we are on deck," Dublin Mike remarked. "The captain, you see, is an Englishman with a good deal of the bulldog about him, and he won't be likely to yield his wealth without a fight even if we are four to one."

"We have made our count on having to lay him out afore we kin get at his plunder, and we are prepared to play the game right up to the handle too!"

Then opening his coat Dublin Mike showed that a brace of revolvers were belted to his waist.

"Have you a pistol to spare for me?" Spader asked.

"The infernal detectives went through me after they snapped the bracelets upon my wrists and took every tool I had, even to my pen-knife."

"I reckon I kin fix you out," responded the other, "as I happen to have a spare 'barker' in my coat pocket. It isn't quite so big a we'pon as these hyer ones in my belt, but it is a good tool for all that. It's an English bulldog."

"But first let me see if I can get them ornaments off your wrists."

He took from his pocket a bunch of keys, and after several trials, found one with which he succeeded in unlocking the handcuffs.

Then producing the weapon he gave it to Spader.

"Putty wet, ain't yer," Dublin Mike observed his hand happening to come in contact with the wet sleeve of the other.

"Oh, yes, I had a long swim of it, but I don't mind a little thing like that," Old Nick observed, with a laugh.

"Lemme see, we must be getting putty near to our game," Dublin Mike said at this point peering ahead through the darkness.

"I say, old man, you are going ahead in this business like an old hand at it," Spader remarked.

"Now you hit me whar I live!" Dublin Mike exclaimed with a grin.

"This hyer water business is an old holt of mine, as it was of my father before me. Why, I was a river rat and used to scoop in plunder afore I was fifteen years old, and it was through gitting inter trouble on the river that made me skip to the West, so you see, it comes jest as nat'ral to me to do a trick of this kind as to come any of our Western hanky-panky business."

"I see, that explains the mystery."

"Take it easy, boys, I think I see our craft ahead," Dublin Mike warned in a cautious tone.

The boat was provided with a rudder, and Dublin Mike, with his hand upon the tiller, steered the craft.

The men rowed with increased caution, and thanks to the oarlocks being muffled, the boat glided through the water like a phantom craft.

The marauders gazed eagerly forward, straining their eyes to pierce the darkness.

Dublin Mike was naturally keen-sighted, and then long experience at this night business had trained his eyes, so he caught sight of the lights which indicated the position of the vessel of which they were in search before any of the rest.

Slowly and with the utmost caution the boat approached the vessel, which was a large brig.

After sighting the craft, Dublin Mike steered so as to bring his boat up under the bow-chains, which he effected without any evidence that his approach had been discovered.

Short Bill quickly fastened the boat's "painter" to one of the chains, and then, revolver in hand, commenced to clamber on board.

Johnny Legs, also with his weapon ready, followed directly behind him.

Both of these men were bloodthirsty ruffians, who would not hesitate to take life if any one interposed between them and a rich booty.

When the two were well up in the chains, Spader and Dublin Mike proceeded to follow their example.

"I reckon that it looks now as if we were going to do this trick as easy as rolling off a log!" Dublin Mike observed with a chuckle to Spader as they prepared to climb up by the aid of the chains.

"Yes, it looks like a soft thing!"

But appearances in this uncertain world are often not to be trusted, as the river rats soon discovered to their consternation.

The English captain was an old seaman, a man of vast experience, and one not to be usually caught napping.

He was on the watch for just such an attempt as this, for he had lain in New York Harbor before, and knew that in none of the large maritime cities of the world were there to be found a more desperate set of river rats.

He was fully armed, and had grimly determined to give the marauders a lesson which would be apt to strike terror into the hearts of all the river thieves.

So he gave no sign of his presence until Short Bill had gained the bowsprit, upon which he stood, and Johnny Legs had his head and shoulders above it; then he spoke:

"Hello, what do you want?" he cried sternly, advancing toward them through the gloom, a cocked revolver in each hand ready for action.

"Your money, you son of a gun!" cried Short Bill defiantly, prepared for war the moment he discovered that the captain was on the alert.

But quick as was the ruffian to begin hostilities the English captain was still quicker, and he fired two shots, one from each revolver, before Short Bill could raise his pistol to the level.

The seaman was a good marksman and being only some ten feet distant, despite the gloom, his first bullet went true to its aim, cutting the very heart of the ruffian in twain.

With a single gasp of anguish Short Bill threw out his arms, clutching convulsively with his hands at the air, and then pitched headlong into the dark tide below.

And the second shot, the one discharged from the revolver in the left hand of the English captain, although fired almost at random, was equally fatal as the first, for the bullet struck Johnny Legs in the head, and passed through the brain producing instant death.

Down came the ruffian on the heads of the pair below, preparing to ascend, knocking them into the bottom of the boat, and then the body rebounded into the water, striking the rope with which the craft was tied to the chains in its way, and as the painter had not been secured in anticipation of any such strain as this, it gave way and the boat floated off with the current.

The English captain had rushed to the bulwarks after the disappearance of the two ruffians for the purpose of seeing if there were any more of the gang, but the two men being huddled in the bottom of the boat escaped his vision, and so he refrained from firing, believing that the pair whom he had shot composed the gang.

Dublin Mike and Nick Spader hardly dared to breathe until they got well out of sight of the vessel where they had encountered so warm a reception.

"Blazes! I don't want no more of this in mine," Dublin Mike observed as he proceeded to adjust the oars in the locks.

"No, nor I; I prefer the West."

"By gum! I've got a big scheme and it will take us to the West too. The idee jest flashed onto me. Are you game for it?"

"Game for anything to make a dollar and to get away from this country!" Spader replied.

CHAPTER III.

A CUNNING SCHEME.

"I will explain my leetle scheme in a mighty few words," Dublin Mike observed as he bent to the oars.

"The idee jest came to me and it is a hummer now, I tell yer!"

"Well, Mike, you were always noted for having a head on your shoulders," Nick Spader remarked.

"Yes, I reckon that is so. Have you been long in the East?"

"No, not a great while."

"Long enuff to know what is going on, I s'pose?"

"Oh, yes, I am tolerably well posted."

"Have you ever run across Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes, I met him up along the Platte some twenty years ago, just about the close of the war."

"That's kind of curious, fur it war 'bout that time I fu'st run across him."

"Well, I s'pose you know that Buffalo has a show hyer in New York now?"

"Yes, the Wild West, as he calls it."

"It's a big thing and don't you forget it!" the other declared.

"I took it in when it first opened up, 'cos I had an idee that among the cowboys and the bucks I might see some old acquaintances."

"And did you?"

"Oh, yes, a heap of 'em, and some of the galoots would undoubtedly have given a pile of money if they could have known that I was a-looking on at their monkey shines, for there's about a dozen in the show, red, white and yaller, who would be glad to raise my hair; you see, Nick, in my time I have been obliged to buck a'gin, Injuns, white men and Mexicans."

"I havn't the least' doubt about that!" Nick Spader exclaimed with a laugh.

"All war fish that came to your net."

"I walked around among the gang and took a squint into their tents, as bold as brass, before the show opened, for I wasn't in the least afraid of being recognized by any of them, for since I shaved off my long beard and cut my hair short I don't look much like the man who used to make it lively for them on the border."

"You don't, for a fact," the other admitted.

"But I recognized you the moment I set eyes on you."

"Oh, well, an old side pardner like you would

be apt to, but when it comes to a man who is only slightly acquainted with me, this hyar get-up would be apt to puzzle him. But to come back to my mutton: I went early in the afternoon, a good hour before the show begun, so as to have a chance to see the gang in their tents, and, as I expected, there was a heap of 'em there that I knew; I kinder chuckled to myself as I stared at 'em with the rest of the tenderfoots to think that thar was plenty on 'em who's fingers would just have itched to get at my top-knot, if they had any idee that Dublin Mike was squinting at 'em.

"One cuss in particular would have given a heap to have got at me, a cowboy named Sioux Sam."

"Ah, yes, I know the man, and a bold blade he is too."

"You bet! Me and my gang surprised and went through the galoot one night—got away with all the wealth he had saved up during the season, and he swore he would kill me on sight if he ever cornered me."

"But you took care that he never got you dead to rights!"

"You bet I did!" Dublin Mike exclaimed.

"In the fu'st place he warn't well enuff acquainted with me to be able to recognize me in any disguise, and in the second, I took precious good care to keep out of his way."

"This hyar thing happened 'bout five years ago, so I felt safe 'bout his spotting me now."

"Of course I expected to run across chaps like him whom I knew when I went to the show, but thar was one party thar whom I didn't look to see."

"Did you ever hear tell of the Ute princess, Snow White Dove?"

"Yes, the daughter of the greatest chief that the Utes ever had, Three Big Bears, by a white woman who was fool enough to fall in love with the red-skin and deserted her people to marry him."

"That's the gal! Well, she was in Buffalo's camp with the other squaws, although her name wasn't in the show-bills, and she had dyed her skin so she looked like a reg'lar Injun."

"The gal, you know, takes after her mother, and is about as white as any white woman, and that is whar she gets her name from."

"Yes, I know, I have seen her."

"Well, when I spied her I was bothered to understand what she was doing in the camp under a false name and painted up like a reg'lar squaw."

"By accident I got onto it though; I ran across one of the hostlers, a shiftless sort of cuss, fond of liquor, and when he gets a cargo on board, if the trick is worked right, the galoot will tell all he knows; Ben Stevens is his name, but most ever'body out in Colorado used to call him Bow-legged Ben."

"Yes, I know the man, but I never knew he ever h'listed much poison."

"That is because he kin stand a heap of benzine, and even when he is as full as a tick it takes a man like myself who knows how to handle the man to do anything with him."

"Now I knew that Ben Stevens was well acquainted with the Snow White Dove as I was myself, and I felt sart'in he must know she was in the camp, so, having an idee thar was something queer 'bout the matter, I set out to get at the rights of the business."

"That was natural."

"I wasn't much afear'd of Bow-legged Ben gitting onto who I really was, for he wasn't well acquainted with me, and so I jest rung myself in on him as having met him out at Red Bluffs, and pretended to be awful glad to run across him hyer."

"I told the galoot that I had made a rich strike in the mines and had come East with a pocketful of rocks to enjoy myself."

"He swallowed the bait, of course."

"Oh, you bet he did, hook and all! I made an appointment to meet him at a quiet shebang—on the queer, you know, but run mighty keeful for fear of the police, and then, when I got him full enuff I put the pumps in operation. I told him right out that I had recognized the Snow White Dove, and wanted to know what in thunder she was doing hyer in New York with Buffalo Bill's show, painted so as to look like a reg'lar squaw and with a false name."

"That was coming right to the point."

"Yes, but I had got him so mellow that I knew I wasn't risking anything."

"He owned right up that it was just as I said, and he admitted he was getting hush money from the gal to hold his tongue about her being with the outfit, as he was the only man in the gang who had discovered she was thar."

"Of course the buck and the squaw, under

whose protection she was, knew, but wouldn't let on."

"But what was the reason for this masquerade?"

"That's the p'int I jumped for, the minite Bow-legged Ben allowed I was right in my notion that the gal was the Snow White Dove. I knew that Ben was no fool, except when he was in liquor, and he would be mighty apt to try his best to find out what the gal was up to."

"Had he discovered?"

"You bet! The gal was dead struck arter the cowboy, Sioux Sam, and when she found that he had agreed to go with Buffalo Bill's outfit she made up her mind to come along too, but as she didn't want Sioux Sam to know she was with the gang she fixed it so as to pass for a common Ute squaw."

"You see this love scrape has been all on one side, like the handle of a pump. The gal is dead gone on Sioux Sam, but the gay and festive cowboy don't seem to hanker arter her, although she is about as much a white gal as a red, has got considerable eddication too, and no stranger would be apt to take her for a red-skin unless he was told, even if he got well acquainted with her."

"Let me see!" exclaimed Nick Spader, abruptly, as a sudden idea occurred to him, "wasn't it this girl who was mixed up in some wild tale about a secret gold deposit of almost incredible richness up in the hills somewhere north of Holy Cross Mountains?"

"A secret mine known only to the great chief of the Ute tribe, the knowledge handed down from father to son."

"Yes, that is it; that is the way I heard the story, and as the last great chief of the Utes, who was the Three Big Bears, the father of this girl, didn't have a son, on his death-bed he intrusted the secret to her," Spader remarked.

"You have it, straight as a string! And now do you begin to get onto my idea?"

"Well, I can't say that I do, exactly," replied Nick Spader, slowly, after reflecting upon the matter for a moment.

"But I suppose that through the girl you expect to get at the secret of the hidden treasure?"

"Right you are to a dot!" Dublin Mike exclaimed.

"And, mind you, if one-half the stories are true that are told of this mine, it is a bonanza as big as any one that was ever struck on this hyer solid earth."

"In the old days the Utes used to bring in nuggets worth from fifty to a hundred dollars, red bullets, as they called them, but when they found how crazy the whites were to get at the secret of the mine, the red bucks were smart enuff to stop bringing in the solid chunks."

"But the mine is thar, all the same, just as it was thirty odd years ago, when the gold fever first broke out."

"How are you going to get at it through the girl? You don't expect to coax the secret out of her, do you?"

"I'm going to use this infatuation of hers for Sioux Sam," Dublin Mike replied, with a shrewd chuckle.

"Now I have got you I can work it; for you are just the kind of man to work such a game. I'll get on the right side of the gal, pretend I can make it all right between her and Sioux Sam."

"Then we'll get Sam out of the way for a while, and have you write a letter apparently coming from Sam, telling the gal to follow him to the West, where they will be married, and to come with me disguised, for fear of Buffalo Bill stopping the fun. You kin imitate all kinds of hand-wrote, you know!"

"When we get her in the West, we will offer to swap the cowboy for the secret of the mine."

Nick Spader pondered over the matter for a moment, and then exclaimed:

"If we work it right it is ten to one we do the trick!"

CHAPTER IV.

WORKING THE PLOT.

It was little wonder that the heart of the Indian princess had been captivated by the dashing young plainsman who was known as Sioux Sam, for in addition to being a royal good fellow, he was as perfect a specimen of manly beauty as could be found in a long day's travel.

A little above the medium height, magnificently built, possessing muscles that an ancient gladiator would have envied, with his frank, open countenance, fringed with flaxen hair, worn long after the scout fashion, and lit with a pair of clear, honest blue eyes, he was the observed of all observers when he made his ap-

pearance in the arena, presided over by the famous Buffalo Bill.

The maiden, too, was well-formed by nature, and would have passed for a beauty even amid the city belles; but in order to disguise herself and prevent any one from suspecting that the princess was in the show, she had disfigured her pretty face with a walnut dye, and arranged her luxuriant, coal-black hair in such an ugly fashion, almost covering her high forehead, and plastered against the side of her cheeks, that it entirely changed her appearance, and no one would be apt to believe that she was really a beautiful girl.

Sioux Sam had little idea of the passion which he had inspired in the heart of the maiden, for she was almost a stranger to him.

He had made her acquaintance in a romantic fashion.

Halting for a few days in the little mining-camp of Red Bluff, up in the Colorado mountains, while on his way to join Buffalo Bill's Wild West, one night he had interfered to prevent some miners, who had drank more whisky than was good for them, from molesting three Indians who were proceeding quietly out of the town.

As it happened, all three of the Indians were women, and when the miners made this discovery they were determined to have "some fun" with the "heathen," and their first demand was that the three should perform a war-dance for their amusement.

Sioux Sam's arrival on the scene just at this time upset the plans of the drunken fellows.

Rendered confident by their numbers they "went in" to "clean out" the intruder, but the plainsman, single-handed, was more than a match for them and it did not take many minutes for the miners to realize that they had made the biggest kind of a mistake, and they soon took to their heels and ran for dear life.

And from that day the young girl cherished a love for the daring scout and contrived to meet him in the camp.

But Sioux Sam, although as brave as a lion where men were concerned, was singularly shy and reserved with women, and he had not the slightest impression that the girl took any particular interest in him.

She was grateful, of course, because he had been able to render her a service; that was only natural, and the young man regarded the girl's earnest words in no other light.

It is probable that if he had remained in the camp his eyes might have been opened in time, but two days afterward he left for the East, and the Indian princess made the rash resolve to follow him, and so well had she played the part she assumed, that no one in Buffalo Bill's outfit, with the exception of Bow-legged Ben, succeeded in penetrating her disguise.

It was a bold game that Dublin Mike and Old Nick set out to play, but if any men could carry such a scheme through they were the ones to do it.

Although Spader felt pretty certain that the detectives, from whom he had so cleverly escaped, believed him to have found a watery grave, yet for fear of a recapture he assumed a disguise which completely changed his personal appearance, and then he did not hesitate to go where he liked.

The pair were constant visitors to Buffalo Bill's show, and, taking advantage of a favorable opportunity, Dublin Mike got into conversation with the Indian princess and told her frankly that he knew who she was, and then, pretending that he had been in Red Bluff when the incident occurred which had brought her and the young plainsman together, he said right out that he guessed he could tell the reason that had brought her in disguise so far from her home.

Dublin Mike was an artful talker, and it did not take him long to secure the confidence of the girl, the task rendered more easy by his bold statement that he and Sioux Sam were bosom friends, and that he had often heard the scout speak in regretful terms of the beautiful Indian girl whom he had left behind at Red Bluffs.

This caused the heart of the girl to beat for joy, for she had not the slightest suspicion that her new-made friend was deceiving her.

And then, too, he told her that there wasn't the least doubt in his mind that if Sioux Sam could get a release from his engagement with Buffalo Bill he would immediately quit and hasten to Colorado as soon as the iron horse could carry him.

The Indian princess begged that he would not betray her secret to the scout, for now she began to be apprehensive that her passion had caused her to take a bold and unmaidenly step.

The deceiver protested that he could be trust-

ed; nay more, he assured the girl he would keep on the watch, and if Sioux Sam made up his mind to return to the West he would let her know, and he assured her that he would do all in his power to aid in joining her to the man of her heart.

It was no wonder that the innocent Indian maiden was deceived, for Dublin Mike was such a cunning villain that old and experienced men of the world had been tricked by him.

After a while, when he saw that he had fully gained the girl's confidence, he pretended that he had hinted to the scout that she was in New York and Sioux Sam had been delighted at the discovery.

"In fact," as he said to the deluded maiden, apparently in a burst of confidence, "there is no use mincing the matter: the moment he heered you were in the city, he owned right up to me that he was dead in love with you ever since the time when he made your acquaintance in the mining-camp, and had felt as queer as a fish out of water in this hyer Eastern country, so far away from home."

"He's awful bashful though, and that is the reason why he never dared to hint to you that he worships the very ground on which you tread."

This disclosure, naturally, made the heart of the Indian princess leap for joy, for she had not the slightest suspicion that there was any deception, baving the most absolute faith that every word her new-found friend spoke was true.

Under these circumstances she was not in the least surprised, when, after a few days had elapsed, Dublin Mike announced to her that Sioux Sam had made up his mind he could not endure such a life longer.

His passion had grown so intense that he felt he must have the girl he loved so dearly for his own for all time, and he had requested Dublin Mike—the plotter was not known by his own name, but called himself Billy Taylor, of Silver-Cliffs—to ask the girl if she would follow him to Red Bluffs if he "jumped" the show and fled to the West.

"He wants me to look out for you, you know, and bring you out there to meet him," the arch-deceiver said in conclusion.

The Indian princess did not hesitate for a moment in deciding to go.

Her love was so intense that she would have dared all possible danger; no obstacle great enough to keep her from fleeing to the arms of the man she adored.

Dublin Mike explained that Sioux Sam had endeavored to get Buffalo Bill to release him from his contract, but as he was reluctant to explain why he wanted to quit, the great scout was not willing to comply with his request, so the young plainsman had determined to take French leave, and as he feared the law might be called upon to detain him, he was going to disguise himself and go West by a roundabout way.

He suggested that as soon as the girl heard he was among the missing, she should depart, escorted by "Billy Taylor," and, as suspicion might be excited, and the police placed upon his track, it was his idea that she had better assume a disguise.

The girl agreed to this readily enough, and in parting, the pretended friend cautioned her to be on the watch.

"You will find that Sioux Sam has gone from some of the boys some morning," he said, "and then you must prepare to git out as soon as possible. I will bring a disguise for you, a regular white woman's dress, you know, with a hat and a veil, which you kin draw over your face after the style of some of the white gals."

"You kin put on the rig inside your tent, wash the paint and dye off, then slip out. I will be waiting for you, and it is a thousand to one that we kin git out of the garden without any one gitting onto our trick."

The girl assented to the plan, and Dublin Mike departed to join Old Nick, who was near at hand, anxious to learn if the scheme was likely to succeed.

"It is all right," Dublin Mike replied, in answer to the questioning look of the other. "She hasn't got the least bit of a suspicion, and we kin work the thing as easily as rolling off a log. You won't have to write no letter."

And then he explained to his fellow-plotter how he had arranged matters with the girl.

Nick Spader nodded in approbation.

"We will do the trick beyond a doubt," he exclaimed.

"Yes; but now comes the most difficult part of the job," Dublin Mike observed.

"We must get Sioux Sam out of the way for

a day or two, so as to lead the girl to suppose he has gone to the West."

"Well, as you have made his acquaintance, it ought not to be so very hard to get at him outside of the garden, and if we can get him to visit our den the trick can be worked."

"That is just what I have been laying wires for," Dublin Mike replied, with a knowing wink, "and I have got the affair pretty well arranged, I reckon."

"Thar's a party going off for a leetle racket to-night arter the show is over, and Sioux Sam has promised to jine in. I'm going too, and at our first halt we will ring you into the gang."

"Good enough," Old Nick exclaimed, emphatically.

"The devil himself must work against us if Sioux Sam escapes from our trap."

"That is exactly what I think. It is dollars to cents we do the trick!" Dublin Mike declared.

CHAPTER V.

INSNARED.

The scheme had been shrewdly planned and the two adventurers were just the men to carry it out.

Through the aid of Bow-legged Ben, Dublin Mike had been able to make Sioux Sam's acquaintance, and, as the ruffian had so completely changed his appearance, there was no suspicion that the stranger who took such a lively interest in the Wild West show was one of the desperadoes who had once made things so lively in the neighborhood of Red Bluffs.

Nick Spader too had been introduced to the scout, and the young man, never suspecting that there are as many snakes in the grass amid the populous haunts of the East as in the western wilderness, was decidedly impressed with the agreeable stranger.

There were three in the party who had obtained leave of absence from Buffalo Bill on this particular night.

The great scout ruled his show with true military discipline and kept his men well in hand.

Bow-legged Ben had suggested the "racket" to a pard of his, named Mustang John, and he being on intimate terms with Sioux Sam, had induced the scout to join the party.

So, after the show was over on this particular night, the three men after completing their duties, left Madison Square Garden in company.

On the street they were joined by Dublin Mike and the party proceeded to a well-known saloon in the neighborhood where they had a glass of beer.

In the saloon they encountered Old Nick, who was immediately invited by Dublin Mike to join them.

After a show of assumed reluctance this gentleman consented, and the party set off to "see the elephant," as Dublin Mike remarked.

It was not a remarkable elephant that the party saw though, for they merely made the rounds of the various up-town gardens where melody—and beer—flowed freely.

About one o'clock, Nick Spader suggested that a little substantial refreshment would be in order, and as the rest agreed to this, he piloted the party to a small, English chop-house, as he termed it, on one of the up-town cross-streets.

The police authorities, though, would have given a different name to the place, which was saloon and restaurant combined.

In reality, it was a "house of call" for thieves, and its reputation was that more desperate crimes had been planned beneath its roof, and it had sheltered a greater number of criminals both of high and low degree, than any other place of the kind on the Manhattan Island.

But for all of this, it was a quiet little place, a small bar-room, a chop apartment adjoining, and some small rooms up-stairs for the accommodation of private parties.

Although the police knew that it was the resort of the worst criminals in the city, yet no scenes of disorder ever took place within its walls, and they could make no complaints on this score.

The proprietor, a big, burly Englishman, a retired prize-fighter, was not the kind of man to allow any disturbance to go on likely to bring the notice of the police to his place.

To all outward seeming, the establishment was perfectly reputable, and none of the Wild West boys had any suspicion that there was anything out of the way with the place after they got inside.

By this time, Bow-legged Ben, who was a very weak-headed fellow, and easily affected by liquor, was beginning to feel the effect of what he had drank, although none of the party had in-

dulged at all strongly, so the moment he entered the chop-house, he made a bee-line for the bar, and announced his intention of "firing a quart of benzine" down his throat.

"Say, this fellow is in for a racket here," said Old Nick, in the ear of the young scout, "and I am not anxious to have any in mine."

"Neither am I," Sioux Sam observed; "I don't mind a few glasses of beer, but I don't care to stand up to a bar and gulp down whisky. There's no fun in that sort of a thing for me!"

"That is my opinion exactly. I am rather dry, and I wouldn't mind a little native wine, a bottle of catawba, or something of that sort, but no whisky."

"I tell you what, I think we can get out of this if we work it right. Shall I try it?"

"Yes, by all means," Sioux Sam answered, "for now that Ben has started on whisky there is no telling when he will stop."

"I know him of old; when he gets three or four horns of whisky into him, it seems to make another man of him; he gets crazy and is not satisfied to stop drinking until he is unable to stand up."

"Well, I don't care to go through a programme of that kind," Nick Spader remarked.

"I don't see any fun in a man making a beast of himself, so we will get out."

"All right! I'm with you."

"We will have a chop in a private room upstairs, and leave this fellow to the delights of his spree."

"Go through that door," and Spader pointed to one between the bar and the main entrance to the saloon. Enter the first door you come to up-stairs. I have had many a cosey meal in that little room, and so I know the lay of the land. I will remain here and cover your retreat; being a stranger, I will be able to get along better with this idiot than you, for he's just in that state to get angry if a pard should refuse to drink with him."

This was good counsel, and Sioux Sam made haste to follow it.

The others being occupied in listening to Bow-legged Ben, who was gravely informing the barkeeper that he was "a tin man on wheels," "the bounding buffalo of the old Rockies," "a bad man to tackle," and a lot of other stuff of similar character, it was an easy matter for Sioux Sam to make his escape without attracting the notice of the rest.

And none of them observed his absence until, at the close of his remarks, Bow-legged Ben called upon the others to "nominate their poison."

Then there was an explosion.

"Darn my cats, if Sam hain't gi'n us the shake!" the prairie hostler cried in wrath.

"No, he's just gone up-stairs to have a chop," Nick Spader explained.

"Blamed if I don't have him down!" Bow-legged Ben declared, and he made a movement toward the stairs.

Dublin Mike was on the alert for just such a thing as this, and he immediately laid hold of Bow-legged Ben's shoulder.

"Oh, no, no, you can't play no sich game as that on sich roosters as we are!" he exclaimed. "You are trying to slip, so that we won't get no drink, but you can't come no sich trick as that onto us!"

"Come back and set up the bug-juice like a man!"

The plotter had calculated shrewdly, for this appeal immediately drove all idea of going after the deserter from Bow-legged Ben's mind.

"Oh, no, boys, I sw'ar I didn't have no sich idee as that."

"Let the cur go if he wants to; and I say, old man," he cried to Nick Spader, "you oughten to have a drink either, for letting Sioux Sam slide out without saying anything 'bout it!"

"Well, fine me a bottle of catawba wine, and I will carry it up to Sam," Nick Spader replied, chuckling as if he thought he was getting off a capital joke.

Dublin Mike took occasion to give out his opinion that it would be a big thing to send up the wine to Sioux Sam, "seeing that such stuff is only fit for a gal to drink."

So Nick Spader was able to retreat with the wine, leaving the rest to enjoy Bow-legged Ben's hospitality at the bar.

Up-stairs in the private apartment he found the young scout.

The room was small, about twelve feet square, plainly furnished, and with nothing visible to excite any one's apprehensions that it was anything but what it pretended to be, an apartment where a party of gentlemen could enjoy a meal in private, without any danger of being intruded upon.

"I had quite a time to get away," Old Nick observed as he entered the room carrying the bottle of wine and a couple of glasses in his hand.

And as he came in he closed the door behind him.

A careless move, apparently, but upon the door was a spring lock, and the closing barred the portal.

No one without a key could now gain admission to the room.

He filled the glasses and pushed one over to the young scout.

"I've ordered a couple of chops," Nick Spader remarked, then taking up his glass examined the wine in a critical manner.

"Looks like good stuff," he continued.

"Well, here goes!"

Sioux Sam nodded to Spader and drained his glass.

But the moment that Old Nick got the fluid into his mouth he was seized with a coughing fit and had to spit it all out.

"Darn the thing!" he cried, "it went down the wrong way!"

"But we'll try 'em again!"

Spader refilled the glasses, then the two nodded at each other and again Sioux Sam disposed of his liquor, but just as Spader got his to his lips, he pretended that he thought he heard a noise at the door and with the exclamation: "I reckon some of the gang are coming up!" he hurried to the portal, continuing to spill the contents of his glass upon the floor as he went along.

At the door he made believe to listen for a moment, then shook his head, saying:

"No, they ain't coming up; it is their chin-ning down-stairs that I hear," and with his back to Sioux Sam he made a pretense of drinking the wine.

Smacking his lips, lustily, as he turned around he exclaimed:

"Well, now, that is pretty good stuff!"

As the reader has doubtless suspected, the wine was drugged, and by this time the two doses which Sioux Sam had taken began to operate.

The scout looked up in a stupid sort of way, nodded as if he comprehended what had been said, but the drug had bound his senses so that he was unable to reply, and then, slowly, his head sunk upon the table.

"That settles him!" Old Nick cried in triumph.

Then he touched the spring of a secret door in the wall. It opened and disclosed a dumb-waiter, big enough to hold a man.

Upon this he placed the insensible scout, touched a button projecting on the wall and down into the lower regions sunk the machine with its helpless burden.

The trick was successful.

CHAPTER VI.

A GLOOMY PROSPECT.

WHEN Sioux Sam woke to consciousness he found himself in utter darkness.

He was stretched upon a rude bunk, as he discovered upon examination, which vividly recalled the Wild West to his remembrance; and there was a dull pain in his head as though he had been dazed by a heavy blow.

He rose, sat on the edge of the bed, pressed his aching head with his hands and tried to remember what had happened.

"I feel as if I had been on a spree for a week!" he exclaimed.

"My head seems to be as big as a bushel basket! Mighty strange, too, for I didn't drink enough to hurt me, and it was that wine too which seemed to sew me up."

"I don't understand it at all!"

By this time his eyes had become in a measure accustomed to the darkness and he was able to get some idea of the apartment in which he sat.

It was a cellar evidently, for the walls were of stone and the atmosphere damp and clammy.

At this point the scout happened to remember that he had some matches in his pocket, and he immediately got them out, struck a light and proceeded to examine the apartment.

As he had guessed, it was a cellar.

A small apartment without windows, but there was a massive door in one corner.

All there was in the place was the rude bunk on which the young scout sat, and a box placed at the head of the bed, upon which was a pitcher of water and a small loaf of bread.

Sioux Sam stared in astonishment at these two articles.

"Hang me if this don't look like one of the underground prison-cells such as they used to have in olden times!" he exclaimed.

And then a sudden thought came to him.

"I've often heard of the Tombs—the prison here in New York—it is a pretty old prison; can it be possible that I got crazy with liquor, and have been locked up in the Tombs?"

By this time the match had burnt out, and he was left in darkness again.

But when he came to reflect upon the wild idea which had come into his head, he comprehended that it was absurd.

"Oh, no! a big city like New York would never have a prison with any such miserable cell as this in it."

"It might do down in some old Mexican city, where the people are only half-civilized, but not in New York."

"But what the deuce does it mean? How in the name of all that is wonderful did I come here, and for what?"

"The bread and water would seem to say that I am a prisoner; but I haven't tried the door yet, and I may be able to walk out for all I know."

Then lighting another match he hastened to the door.

It was a solid, substantial affair, and securely fastened.

Sioux Sam's brows grew dark.

"Well, I am in for it, and no mistake!" he exclaimed, as he stared in baffled astonishment at the door.

And then an idea occurred to him.

"Can it be possible that I have fallen into a trap? It looks like it; but if so, what is the object?"

"Not plunder, for I hav'n't money enough about me to make it worth any one's while. I never thought to examine and see if my pocket-book is all right, although I reckon it wouldn't pan out over five dollars."

"But I have often heard that there are plenty of roughs in this town who would be quick to jump at the chance of laying a man out for a five-dollar bill."

But his wallet was safe, also the few articles of jewelry which he wore, and so the mystery was as deep as ever.

Lighting another match, Sioux Sam made a close examination of the door.

As we have said, it was a substantial piece of work, and the scout shook his head dubiously.

"No hope of breaking a way through such a tough bit of timber as this without the aid of an ax, or a crowbar, and all the tool I have is a small pocket-knife."

"I suppose I may as well make up my mind to grin and bear it."

"Whoever put me in this hole evidently don't intend I shall starve, although bread and water is not the kind of grub I have been accustomed to tackle."

Returning to the bunk the scout stretched himself upon it, and made up his mind to take matters as coolly and as easily as possible.

His match-box was well supplied with matches, and by the aid of his watch, which he now was careful to wind up, he calculated he could reckon the flight of time.

By the fact that his watch had not run down he knew that he had not been in the place very long.

Time passed slowly away.

At last Sioux Sam became hungry and paid his respects to the bread and water.

"Scant rations!" he murmured. "Reminds me of the time when I was lost on the prairie and had to hustle right smart to keep alive."

"One consolation about this thing is, that somebody is bound to come pretty soon, and then I will know what the game is."

But there was a long and weary wait for Sioux Sam, for it was nearly two days before any one came near him.

The bread and water was exhausted, and the prisoner came to the conclusion that either the parties who had placed him in the dungeon had forgotten all about him, or else had reached the decision to leave him there to die of thirst and starvation.

It was nearly midnight, and although Sioux Sam had stretched himself upon the bed he found that it was not possible for him to sleep, so he got up, resolved to remain patient no longer, but to make a desperate fight to escape.

There was only one chance for him, as far as he could see, and that was to try to cut a hole in the door with his knife.

It seemed to be a hopeless task though, for the door was a remarkably solid one and his knife a slender-bladed affair.

"It is the only chance I have got though," he remarked. "And even if I don't succeed it will occupy my mind, and I might as well make the attempt as to sit here and wait for my jailers to come."

And after coming to this resolution, the scout lit a match and proceeded to make a careful examination of the door.

And the result of this inspection was that he decided to commence work at the point where he believed the lock to be situated—the door opening outwardly—reasoning that if he weakened the wood where the screw of the lock penetrated it, he might be able to force his way out.

"It will be a long and weary job, for it will be terrible hard work in the darkness," he murmured, as he commenced operations.

"If I had light, so I could see what I was about, it would not be half as difficult."

But hardly had he got to work when his ears caught the sound of footsteps without.

"Hello! somebody's coming at last!" he exclaimed, feeling decidedly relieved by the discovery.

The footsteps halted outside of his door, and as years of experience on the frontier had trained his eyes and ears, so that both his sight and hearing were wonderfully good, he was able to distinguish that there were three or four men outside of the door.

After the men halted, there was a brief pause as though they were listening to see whether he was awake or not, then came three hearty thumps on the door.

"Hello, hello!" cried a gruff voice, "are you awake in there?"

Sioux Sam hesitated for a moment before he replied, so as to make it appear as if he had been awakened by the knocking, for he thought it would not be wise to allow the strangers to suspect he had been attempting to force his way out.

"All right, I'm awake," he said, retreating quietly to the middle of the apartment before he spoke, so as to give the idea that he had just arisen from the bed.

"Come to the door—I want to have a little talk with you," said the stranger.

"I am at the door," Sioux Sam replied, advancing as he spoke.

"Kinder in a bad box, ain't ye?" asked the unknown.

"Well, I am not as pleasantly situated as I might be."

"I s'pose you wouldn't have any objection to get out of this scrape?"

"Nary an objection!"

"That is what I thought. I s'pose you hav'n't got any idea why this little job was put up onto you."

"No, I hav'n't, not the slightest."

"Well, it is all a mistake."

"A mistake!"

"That's so; you ain't the man who was wanted at all."

"I am glad to hear it," responded Sioux Sam, to whom this explanation appeared to be most reasonable, for he knew of no man in the East who would be apt to wish to do him harm, so the explanation that he was the victim of a mistake seemed all right.

"You hain't been hurt in any way?"

"No."

"I hope you don't bear any malice."

"Well, no, I don't know as I do, although it is pretty rough treatment to shut a man up in a hole like this for two days and feed him on bread and water."

"It was all a mistake, I tell you, and we are mighty sorry for it; we have come to let you out, but we don't want you to get us into any hole."

"Are you willing to swear that you won't bother your head to pry into this affair? Will you be satisfied, if we let you out, to go off quietly about your business?"

Sioux Sam reflected for a moment before he replied.

Of course, he was naturally indignant at the treatment which he had received, but as it was evident that he was in the power of desperate men—and he had seen enough of the East to understand that the big cities held fully as remorseless and bloodthirsty ruffians as could be found in the wildest parts of the West—he came to the speedy conclusion that it would be wiser for him to agree to the proposal made than to anger his jailers by refusing.

"All right! it is a bargain. Release me and I will call it square."

"Won't try to make no trouble for us?"

"No, that's honest."

"It is a go then!"

Then a key was inserted in the lock of the door.

revealed, dressed in common dark clothes, but each man's face was hidden by a mask of black crape, through which their gleaming eyes could be dimly seen, but no other feature.

The foremost man held a bull's-eye lantern in his hand, the rays of which gave light to the scene; the other three displayed cocked revolvers, so that if the prisoner had any disposition to show fight this display would be apt to cause him to restrain his temper.

"Well, you are all right, anyhow," the man with the lantern remarked, evidently the leader of the band.

"Don't look as if you had suffered much."

"Oh, I am used to roughing it, and a little thing like this don't worry me to death, although I must admit I was getting awful tired of the grub," Sioux Sam answered.

"Well, I suppose that bread and water ain't just the fodder for a man who has been used to three good, square meals a day," the masked man remarked.

"But, as I told you, it was all a mistake," he continued. "You are not the man who was wanted at all. I am sorry for it, but mistakes will happen, you know, in the best regulated families."

"Oh, that is all right."

"We have come to let you out now, and I hope that after you are free you won't feel ugly about the matter and try to make any trouble for us. I don't think you could succeed in getting on our track, no matter how hard you tried, and if I was you, I wouldn't bother my head about the thing, for you will only have your trouble for your pains."

"I will not be apt to try to trouble you in any way," the scout replied.

"Now we will take you out of this, but you will have to let us blindfold you."

"Blindfold me?"

"Yes, we are going to take all the precautions we can to keep you from getting on our track in case you should happen to change your mind after you get out of this and should take the notion in your head to put the police on the scent."

"Oh, I am not at all likely to do that!"

"Well, that is just what we think, but still we calculate it is better to be on the safe side."

"All right! I haven't any objection; go ahead with your blindfolding."

The masked man produced a heavy black silk handkerchief, gave his lantern to one of the others, and then proceeded to tie the handkerchief over Sioux Sam's eyes in so scientific a manner that when the job was completed the young scout had no more use of his eyes than if he had not possessed a pair.

"Now, then, you are all right," the disguised chief observed.

"I will take your hand and guide you. We are going to put you in a carriage and bring you back to New York—I suppose you didn't have any idea that you had been carried out of the city?"

"No, I did not."

"Well, it's so, but half an hour's drive will bring you to Harlem, and there you can take a car down-town."

"Now, after you get in the carriage, don't try to be ugly, for you are in the hands of desperate men, and we will be apt to use desperate measures if you force us to by cutting up any monkey shins."

"Well, I will admit that I don't feel particularly friendly to you on account of this trick," Sioux Sam observed, with perfect frankness; "but as long as you are going to get me out of this hole, and haven't robbed or harmed me in any way, I can assure you that I shall not bother my head in trying to discover who you are."

"That's the talk! That shows that your head is screwed on right!" the masked ruffian exclaimed.

"Now give me your hand and come on!"

Sioux Sam obeyed the injunction.

Out from his prison-pen he went, was conducted by his guide along a narrow passage, then up a flight of stairs, and finally into the street, where he was assisted to enter a coach, the guide getting in with him.

As soon as they were in the hack, away went the vehicle at a good pace, the guide taking occasion to caution the young man not to remove the handkerchief.

"Wait until I tell you to take off the handkerchief," he said.

"All right; I will not attempt to do so."

"That's playing the right sort of game!" the captor exclaimed, in an approving tone.

"There's nothing like taking things easy in this world."

CHAPTER VII.

THE EXPLANATION.

WHEN the door swung open four men stood

"Only a little while now, and you will be free to go where you like, and none the worse either for this little racket."

It proved to be as the unknown said.

After a half-hour's drive, the carriage came to a halt.

"Wait a moment," the guide then cautioned. "Give me a chance to get out of the way. Just count about fifty, now—slowly, you know—and then you can take the handkerchief off, get out of the carriage, and go where you like. Mind, you have given your word that you will not try to bother us."

"Don't be alarmed; I shall not trouble you."

"So-long; see you again some time, maybe!"

And then the unknown left the carriage.

Sioux Sam counted fifty leisurely, waited for a moment, then removed the handkerchief and looked around him.

As he had anticipated, he was in a hack—a common-looking and not over-clean vehicle.

The hack was standing in a rather narrow street, and as far as he could make out in the darkness, the houses on both sides of the way were small, wooden structures.

He quitted the carriage, and the moment he got clear of the vehicle, shutting the door behind him, the driver instantly started his horses, whipping them into a sharp trot, so that if Sioux Sam had had any idea of interviewing the driver, this movement would have prevented it.

But the young scout had no such notion.

He was satisfied to get out of his unpleasant predicament thus easily, and there was not the slightest doubt in his mind in regard to the tale told by the masked man.

There was no reason why any one should wish to work him harm, and so he was satisfied that a mistake had been made and he had been captured in place of some one else.

He followed the hack down the street, and when he reached the corner, found himself in Third avenue.

By the time he came the owner of the carriage was out of sight.

Although by this time it was after midnight, Sioux Sam found a hotel without difficulty, one of the all-night places, but perfectly respectable and procured lodgings there.

He did not wish to go to the show at such an untimely hour.

He was up early in the morning and took a train on the Elevated road, which speedily carried him down-town.

When he made his appearance in Madison Square Garden a shout of astonishment went up from all his associates, and many were the questions showered on him.

Buffalo Bill was attracted by the noise, happening to enter the Garden just at that moment accompanied by a fine-looking young man, a Western friend whom he had chanced to encounter on the previous evening.

And right glad was Buffalo Bill to meet with this old acquaintance, for he was a partner as true as steel and as good as gold.

It was the renowned scout and plainsman, Cool Colorado, who figured as the hero of our novel, "Cool Colorado, or the Half-breed Detective."

The great scout was amazed by the unexpected appearance of Sioux Sam.

"Well, where on earth did you come from?" he exclaimed.

"I was just beginning to be afraid that some of these New York Injuns had got hold of you, and I was meditating if I hadn't better call in the sharps of the detective police to my assistance."

"I didn't know but what you had wandered down-town and got lost in some of the canyons thar."

"The sharps hyer tell me that thar's a worse wilderness down around Wall street for men to get lost in than any tangled patch we can scare up in the West out toward sundown."

"Well, I reckon that's a fact, Mr. Cody," the scout replied.

"By the way, do you know Mr. Colorado hyer?" Buffalo Bill asked, abruptly.

"No, I think not, although out in the West I know one Mr. Colorado pretty well by reputation—Cool Colorado."

"This hyer is the man," and then Buffalo Bill introduced the two.

Each was pleased to meet the other, and it was a hearty hand-shake which they exchanged.

"Come into my office, boys, whar we can talk this little matter over," said Buffalo Bill, leading the way to his private apartment.

The two young men followed.

The great scout produced cigars and after

they were all comfortably seated, and the weeds lighted, he said:

"Now, Sioux, go ahead with your yarn, for I have an idea from your looks that you have had an adventure."

"That is a fact, a mighty queer one too, and yet it doesn't amount to anything after all," Sioux Sam replied.

"Fire away!"

The young scout obeyed the command and related all that occurred to him from the time he left Madison Square Garden until he returned to it.

Buffalo Bill listened with the utmost attention.

"Well, it is a mighty strange affair, and there has been another strange circumstance, too, occurred."

"Do you know the Ute princess, the Snow White Dove?" he asked, abruptly.

"Yes, I met her at Red Bluffs—in fact, I was lucky enough to be able to be of service to her," and then he explained how he had rescued her from the drunken miners.

"I suppose that little affair made the gal think a heap of you, eh, Sioux?" queried the great scout, with a shrewd glance at the honest face of Sioux Sam.

The young plainsman laughed and appeared a trifle confused.

"Well, I can't really say: she appeared to be grateful—said she would never forget the service, or be able to repay the obligation, and all that sort of thing; mebbe we would have had a little love scrape, but a few days after the affair happened I came East to join you and that, of course, put an end to the acquaintanceship."

"Then you didn't know, Sioux, that the Snow White Dove has been with this outfit right from the start?"

CHAPTER VIII.

GETTING AT THE TRUTH.

The young scout stared in astonishment, for this announcement was a complete surprise to him.

Buffalo Bill was watching the face of Sioux Sam intently with his keen eyes, for, although he believed the scout would not attempt to deceive him, yet long experience had told him that when a young fellow became in love he sometimes acts foolishly.

"Well, I am amazed, Mr. Cody, for I had no suspicion of such a thing," Sioux Sam replied.

"She was hyer with Green Snake and his wife. She is the princess of the tribe, you know, and so Green Snake did as she told him. She had her face and hands stained—in fact, was so completely disguised that no one seems to have mistrusted that she was not the sister of Green Snake's squaw, as she pretended."

"Yes, I see."

"Have you any suspicions why she tried this dodge?" Buffalo Bill asked.

"Indeed I have not," Sioux Sam replied, and the great scout, looking him straight in the eyes, was convinced he told the truth.

"It is a mighty strange affair all round," Buffalo Bill remarked.

"Day before yesterday—the very morning that you were discovered to be absent—Snow White Dove disappeared."

"Green Snake covered up the matter by saying she was in the wigwam, sick."

"Of course, when the report was made to me, not having the slightest suspicion that there was anything crooked about the matter, I didn't trouble myself in regard to it."

"But when two days passed and the girl did not return, Green Snake got uneasy, came to me, and made a clean breast of it."

"Snow White Dove had disappeared without saying a word to him, and he hadn't the least idea what had become of her, but, although he had not been in her confidence at all, yet he had made a shrewd guess why she had disguised herself and joined the show. She had fallen dead in love with a young man about your size, and had joined the show so she could be near him."

Sioux Sam looked serious.

"I hope, Mr. Cody, you will believe me when I say that I hadn't the least suspicion of such a thing!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, I will take your word for it, although I will admit that when I heard of the girl's disappearance—learned who she was, and what brought her to the camp, I jumped at once to the conclusion that you had gone off together."

"That was a very natural conclusion, I am sure," Cool Colorado remarked.

"That's so! I don't wonder at it," the young scout assented.

"Of course, I was puzzled by the thing,"

Buffalo Bill remarked. "Because if you and the gal had a love scrape and wanted to hitch hosses, there wasn't any need for you to run away. All you had to do was to come to me, explain matters, and I would have done my best to help you out."

"Certainly! I know that well enough, and that is exactly what I would have done. You have been too good a friend to me, Buffalo, for me to try any underhand game!" exclaimed the young scout warmly.

"Shake!" cried Buffalo Bill, and the two men exchanged a hearty grip.

"The Green Snake was sure you and the gal had slid out together—natural, under the circumstances, you know, but now that that idea has bu'sted, what on earth has become of the gal?"

"I am utterly in the dark!" Sioux Sam observed.

"Say, Colorado, that is in your line!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill abruptly.

"Colorado came East to work up a little detective business, and the big detective sharps hyer in New York say that he did the job right up to the handle! In fact, I heard that at Police Headquarters they call him the Half-breed Detective."

"They flatter me, I reckon!" Cool Colorado exclaimed with a laugh.

"I don't know about that; I reckon you are as sharp as they make 'em."

"Come, size up this thing, and tell us what you make of it!"

Cool Colorado had already done this in his mind, for he was a natural-born detective, and had formed a theory in regard to the matter.

"Do you suppose that any of the boys in the camp discovered that the Snow White Dove was with the outfit?" Cool Colorado asked.

"Oh, yes, that might be possible, although no one said anything about it to me," Buffalo Bill answered.

"Now, this yarn about Sioux Sam being mistaken for somebody else, I don't take any stock in at all!" Cool Colorado declared.

"It doesn't look probable," Buffalo Bill admitted.

"But if the attack was not a mistake, why was it made?" Sioux Sam asked.

"To get you out of the way for awhile!" replied the Half-breed Detective, coming directly at the truth with that subtle instinct which proclaims the born sleuth-hound.

"But the object of that?" Buffalo Bill questioned.

"To work upon the girl. Sioux hyer disappears without any one knowing where he has gone."

"Now, suppose some plotters have been at work; some men who have recognized the girl as the Ute princess, and in some way discovered that she came to the East because she was struck after our friend hyer. That is not improbable, you know."

The others admitted the truth of this.

"Now, suppose these plotters managed to get on good terms with the girl, and, for a certain object, wanted to get her to leave the show and go to the West, how better could they work the trick than by getting Sioux hyer out of the way for a while?"

"Yes, yes, that's so!" admitted Buffalo Bill, while the young scout nodded assent.

Both were following the Half-breed Detective's argument with intense interest.

"Then they could tell the girl that he had quit the show and gone back to the West—probably succeeded in gaining her confidence so that they could speak of her love affair; a woman may have worked the trick, you know."

Again the others nodded.

"It is evident to me that the girl didn't go off unaided: she must have had some one to help her," Cool Colorado continued.

"Yes, but hold on!" Buffalo Bill exclaimed.

"Thar's one point that you haven't covered. What reason had any one to get the gal West?"

"I have speculated on that too," the Half-breed Detective replied with a quiet smile.

"There is a wild legend connected with this Ute princess, the Snow White Dove, which I remember to have heard some time ago; it is in regard to a rich gold mine in the wilderness north of Holy Cross Mountains."

"By Jove! so thar is!" cried the great scout bringing his hand down with a hearty slap upon his muscular leg, as if to give emphasis to the words.

"I remember now all about it!" I have heard the yarn spun a hundred times by the campfire, but I never took much stock in it, for I have heard so many yarns of that kind that I have got to be mighty doubtful about them."

"I have heard the yarn too," Sioux Sam remarked, "and I know that a good many of the old settlers, men whose heads are level, believe there is something in it."

"We will assume that the parties who have worked this Job are banking on the yarn, and they have decoyed the girl to the West, so that by her aid, they will be able to get at the treasure."

"Well, it ain't impossible," the great scout admitted.

"No, it seems to me to be mighty probable," observed Sioux Sam.

"Now, in order to get on the track of this thing we must get after the two men who were with Sioux hyer when he was drugged—for that was how you were fixed," Cool Colorado remarked, nodding to the young scout.

"The wine you drank, when you went upstairs to the private room, was fixed, and these two strangers, this Billy Taylor and Johnny Smith, were the men who worked the trick, and fellows from the outfit, Mustang John and Bow-legged Stevens, were in with them, although I reckon the parties who ran the game were shrewd enough not to let them see just what the scheme was!"

"I don't believe that Mustang John was in it," Buffalo Bill observed.

"That fellow is as squar' as a die, but I don't bank much on Bow-legged Ben. He's too fond of benzine, and I have known him to play some nasty tricks, although he has been as straight as a string ever since he joined my outfit; he knows of me old, and wouldn't dare to try any gum-games that he thought I would get onto."

"Come to think of it, Bow-legged Ben is from Red Bluffs, and must be mighty well acquainted with all these Utes," the great scout cried in conclusion.

"He's the man we want then!" Cool Colorado exclaimed.

"Have him in and we will put him through a cross-examination."

Bow-legged Ben was immediately summoned, and soon made his appearance, looking considerably alarmed.

Sioux Sam, when he found that the Half-breed Detective's suspicions were directed to Bow-legged Ben, had explained that it was he who had introduced the stranger, who called himself Billy Taylor, and Taylor had made him acquainted with Johnny Smith, and it was Smith who had brought up the drugged wine.

"Say, I want you to tell me all you know about this Billy Taylor!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, sternly, when Bow-legged Ben appeared.

The great scout ruled his show with a rod of iron, and woe betide the man who dared to break any of his well-considered rules.

"Don't try any yarns on me, you know!" Buffalo Bill continued. "I want the truth and nothing but the truth! I've got hold of the tail of a rat and I'm going to snake him out! I want to know all you know about this Ute princess, the Snow White Dove, who has been playing 'possum in my camp, and how this Billy Taylor is mixed up with her!"

Bow-legged Ben was thunderstruck, and, believing that Buffalo Bill knew more than he really did, made a full confession.

Of course, the plotters had managed the affair so skillfully that Bow-legged Ben could not give much new information, only confirm what the far-sighted Half-breed Detective had suspected.

After his tale was ended the man was dismissed with the stern warning to have less to do with strangers in the future.

"Now then, it is as I thought, and we must be off for Colorado as soon as possible!" the Half-breed Detective cried.

"Don't let the grass grow under your feet!" Buffalo Bill exclaimed. "I can't go with you, pard, but I wish you godspeed!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE FLIGHT.

LEAVING the two pards to pursue their journey toward the land of the setting sun, we will turn our attention to the Indian princess.

As the reader has seen, the two plotters had arranged the scheme so cunningly that the Snow White Dove had been able to leave the show without any one being aware that she was missing until hours afterward, and then it was the Ute Indian woman, the Green Snake's squaw, who made the discovery, and the woman, thinking she was doing the Snow White Dove a service by not speaking about her mysterious absence, did not say a word to her husband about the matter until the Green Snake noticed that the girl was absent and inquired into the affair.

Although the Ute princess had not confided her love secret to either the buck or his wife, yet they had made a shrewd guess at the truth, and when Sioux Sam was discovered to be among the missing, they at once jumped to the conclusion the pair had fled in company, and by saying that the supposed squaw was sick gave time for the fugitives to escape!

But, as the reader knows, no pursuit was made until two days had elapsed, and then, no recourse was had to the telegraph, that wonderful agent for arresting fugitives.

Even if the parties in pursuit were certain they could identify the girl by telegraph, so that the western officers would be able to pick her out from a crowd of strangers, there was no particular charge they could make against her sufficient to warrant such an action.

The girl had not been abducted, but had evidently gone of her own free will.

Under the circumstances the only course that the trackers could pursue was to hasten to the West as fast as possible, and trust to luck, after reaching Colorado, to find some trace of the game.

The plotters had shrewdly calculated upon all possible chances when they planned their enterprise.

They did not think the machinery of the law would be called into play, but even if it was, the Ute princess was so well disguised that there was little danger of her being recognized.

So, straight to Colorado the party hurried as fast as the Iron Horse could carry them.

The Snow White Bird and Dublin Mike were together, while Nick Spader occupied a seat in another car.

It was the conspirators' game not to allow the girl to suspect that there was any acquaintanceship between them.

In due time they came to the end of their journey by rail, halting in the town of Gunnison.

Dublin Mike had represented that Sioux Sam, going by a different route, would meet them at Red Bluffs; but in order, as the arch plotter said, to baffle any attempt to track them, the pair did not take the regular stage-coach, but stayed at Gunnison for two days to procure horses.

Dublin Mike explained the delay by pretending that it was impossible for him to get horses to suit.

In reality it was to give time for Nick Spader to make certain arrangements that the delay occurred.

The horses were finally procured though and the pair set out.

Nothing of moment occurred on the journey until they were within a few miles of the mining-camp and the shades of night were close at hand.

The ride had taken more time than had been anticipated, owing to the fact that the horses had turned out to be a pair of foundered steeds, a fact which caused Dublin Mike to declare that he had been most woefully cheated in his horse trade.

They were in a wild and desolate region, the trail had dwindled to a narrow road, winding in and out among the rocks.

Dublin Mike pretended to be a little nervous.

"Mighty lonely spot," he observed. "Just the kind of place for road-agents to hang out, but there isn't much danger of their troubling us."

"We are not the kind of game they are after."

"They seldom trouble travelers like ourselves; stage coaches with plenty of passengers, well-heeled, is what they are looking after."

"Oh, there isn't any danger of our being troubled," the girl said, confidently.

Hardly had the words left her lips though when three dark, rough-looking men, their faces hidden by black masks, stepped into the trail from behind the shelter of the woods.

They were armed with revolvers, which they leveled at the travelers, and loud on the air rung the hoarse command:

"Hands up!"

The pair reined in their steeds immediately.

Taken completely by surprise there wasn't any chance for them to offer resistance, if they had been so disposed.

The Snow White Dove was armed with a revolver, concealed in the folds of her dress, and, under the impulse of the moment, she thrust her hand beneath the cloak she wore as if to grasp it.

Dublin Mike had his eyes on her and was quick to note the movement.

"Don't!" he exclaimed, "don't try any game of that kind, for it will not do us any good!"

"They have got us foul, and we would be foolish to provoke them by any show of resistance."

This was wise counsel, and the girl withdrew her hand.

"Hold on! don't fire!" Dublin Mike exclaimed to the masked strangers, "we surrender!"

"That is where your head is level. It ain't any use for you to be ugly. You are in a mighty tight place, and kicking won't do you any good."

"We have got the deadwood on you, and no mistake!"

"Well, gen'lemen, you won't make much out of us, for we are not well heeled with wealth," Dublin Mike remarked.

"Oh, yes, that is what every man declares when we stop him to collect the toll. This is a toll-road, you understand, and we are the men who collect the tax."

"Light down now, lively! and shell out any pistols or knives that you may happen to be carrying around with you!"

Dublin Mike dismounted promptly, looked inquiringly at the road-agent leader, and then at his companion.

The masked man was quick to comprehend the meaning of the glances.

"Yes, I mean for the lady to get off her animal, too!" the marauder exclaimed. "And I reckon, if she looks carefully, that maybe she can find a revolver, or something of that sort."

"All right, she will do anything to be agreeable, of course," Dublin Mike remarked, and then he hastened to assist Snow White Bird to dismount; she did not wait for his aid though, but slipped nimbly to the ground.

With the patience of her savage race, she resigned herself to the inevitable.

"No. 1, take charge of the weapons of these parties!" commanded the road-agent chief, addressing one of his men.

The man thus distinguished stepped forward; Dublin Mike gave up his six-shooter, then he came to the girl, and she, too, surrendered her weapon.

The road-agent chief had watched the proceeding closely, and he shook his head when he saw that Dublin Mike only gave up a single revolver.

"Oh, come, you have got another pistol somewhere around your clothes!" he exclaimed.

Dublin Mike protested vehemently that he hadn't, but the marauder did not believe the statement and insisted on searching him, a proceeding to which the other submitted willingly enough.

"Oh, you kin s'arch all you like!" he declared.

"You won't find ary other we'pon on me bigger'n a penknife."

"It is jest as I tell you now! I am one of the kind of men whose word you kin tie to, every time."

This seemed to be the truth, for the inspection did not result in the discovery of any more arms.

"I suppose, miss, that you have acted squarely with us and given up all the weapons you had?" the disguised leader remarked, as he approached the girl.

"Yes, sir," she replied.

Then the road-agent appeared to be impressed by the girl's face, and studied it intently for a moment.

"It seems to me that I have seen you somewhere before, but you were dressed rather differently," he observed.

"If I am not mistaken, you are the Ute princess, the Snow White Dove!"

The girl nodded assent; like the most of her race she was sparing of words.

"Well, I am delighted to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance, for it is an opportunity I have long sought."

"By the way, pilgrim," the outlaw chief exclaimed, abruptly, turning to Dublin Mike.

"Did I understand you to say that you wasn't very well heeled as far as wealth was concerned?"

"Yes, that was my say-so."

And if we should go through you for your plunder it would be considerable of a set-back for you?"

"You kin bet your bottom dollar on that!"

Dublin Mike cried.

"Well, we will have to let you down easy then," the outlaw leader observed.

"Mebbe you wouldn't think it from our looks, but we are a mighty wise lot of gentlemen when you come to get acquainted with us."

A series of grim chuckles came from the lips of the road-agents at this piece of information; jesting of this kind was appreciated by them.

Dublin Mike's face seemed to say that he felt decidedly relieved.

"I am glad to hear it!" he exclaimed.

"I told you right at the first that you wouldn't get much wealth out of us."

"Where are you bound?"

"To Red Bluffs."

"Any particular business there?"

"Yes, a leetle private business."

"Are you in much of a hurry?"

"Well, yes, I reckon we want to get thar as soon as we kin."

"Sorry for that, for I have made up my mind to have both of you pay a visit to our ranch up in the mountains," the road-agent observed with courtly politeness.

The travelers looked amazed at this intelligence.

"Oh, I mean it!" the outlaw exclaimed. "I am not joking. We will make you comfortable, and as long as you do as we want you to, you will find us jolly good fellows."

Dublin Mike tried to remonstrate but the outlaw would not listen, and five minutes later all were on the road to the outlaws' retreat.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEMAND.

THROUGH a sort of an Indian trail winding amid the rocks, stubby pines and scraggy oaks which chiefly made up the vegetation of this wild and desolate region the road-agents and their captives proceeded.

They had requested the Snow White Bird to mount her horse, but when Dublin Mike asked if he should follow her example, the outlaw chief replied that as he seemed to have a good pair of legs there wasn't any reason why he shouldn't use them, and then he added, with a chuckle:

"Besides, if you walk along with me we can beguile the way with cheerful conversation," at which remark the prisoner could not help making a grimace.

"If you are perched up on a horse you will be lonesome," the road-agent continued.

"And then some fool idea might come into your head to try a bolt—to escape, you know, and if you did, it would be about a million to one we would fix you for planting so quick that you would never know what hurt you."

"I'm too much of a gentleman to argue the p'nt with you, so I will walk," Dublin Mike replied.

The outlaw chief and Dublin Mike went on in the advance, then came the girl; right behind her one of the road-agents, mounted on Dublin Mike's horse, and the other two outlaws brought up the rear.

They were on the road for a good hour, the trail twisting and turning about in an extremely peculiar way, as though the original makers of it had taken pains to make it as difficult to follow as possible.

At last they came to a lonely ranch, situated on the side of a high hill which commanded a view of the valley beneath.

Both of the captives looked around them eagerly when they came upon the little level space in front of the cabin, just as if they hoped by glancing down in the valley to recognize some familiar objects, but in this, to judge from the expression upon their faces, both were disappointed.

The inspection had told them though that the outlaws had selected their retreat with some skill. The cabin was a rough one-story shanty built out of logs, and after the style common in the Southwest, consisting of two apartments with a passageway between them, all under one roof.

It had been built under the shadow of the trees growing out of the hillside which hemmed in the northern and eastern side of the plateau; to the south was the narrow ledge, up which the trail came, and on the west a steep descent ran toward the valley, fully half a mile off.

There was only one way to reach the cabin—by means of the trail, and a human could go no further than the house, for the steep hillside could not be climbed by human feet, nor could a mortal hope to descend in safety down the rocky wall leading to the ravine below.

And as the cabin nestled amid the shadows of the pines, as we have said, it was impossible for any one to discover it from the valley, even with the aid of a powerful glass.

From the hillside, just beyond the cabin, a limpid spring came gurgling forth, so that if the outlaws were provided with sufficient provisions, they could stand a siege, for the nature of the ground was such that three or four well-

armed men would have a good chance of "holding the fort" against a small army.

"This hyer is our ranch!" the outlaw chief exclaimed, as the party halted in front of the cabin. "And it is a daisy, too, I think you will allow."

"Pears to me that we are further off from Red Bluffs than when we ran across you," Dublin Mike observed. "But it is gitting dark, and as I can't make out the lay of the country from hyer, mebbe I am wrong."

"Oh, we are nearer Red Bluffs than you think," the road-agent leader replied.

"This is a pretty high hill—higher than you imagine, and when all the conditions are favorable a man with good eyesight can see a long ways."

"Yes, ten or fifteen miles, I suppose."

"Oh, further than that; a man can see to the moon, sometimes."

The outlaws indulged in a snicker at this remark, which seemed to them to be extremely witty.

"Now, then, we will talk a little business in good, plain United States language," continued the road-agent leader.

"Just as long as you two behave yourselves, and don't try to come any monkey-shines, you will find us to be the nicest gang of galoots that you ever ran across; but if you should attempt to cut up rusty, we can be the ugliest crowd you ever saw."

"Oh, well, we ain't the kind to make any trouble," Dublin Mike hastened to exclaim.

"Well, I hope so. I hate to use harsh measures, particularly with a woman," the outlaw remarked.

The prisoners were placed in the right-hand apartment, and then, after disposing his men so as to completely guard the cabin, the road-agent captain entered the room in which the prisoners had been confined.

By this time the shades of night had fully descended upon the earth, and the outlaw chief lighted a candle and placed it in a rude sort of candlestick, made by cutting a potato in half.

The apartment could not boast of much furniture, for all there was in the room was a bed made out of pine branches, with a couple of buffalo-robos spread over them, and some small boxes which served for seats.

"Now, sit down and make yourselves comfortable, while we have a little chat together," observed the outlaw, waving his hand with a hospitable air toward the boxes, and he placed the candle on a flat stick, which had been stuck in between a couple of the logs that composed the sides of the cabin.

The girl sat upon the rude bed, Dublin Mike took possession of a box, and the road-agent followed his example.

The prisoners looked at the outlaw inquiringly, for they fancied they were to be favored with an explanation of why they had been captured.

The proceeding was something out of the usual run, for the men who take "toll" on the road, as a rule never trouble themselves with prisoners.

"In the first place, how may I call your name, pilgrim?" asked the outlaw.

"Billy Taylor."

"Ah, yes! I thought I never happened to run across you before," observed the road-agent.

"The lady, though, I have had the pleasure of seeing, and any one who has ever had the chance of meeting the Ute princess, Snow White Dove, would not be apt to forget her," and the outlaw bowed in the most gallant manner to the girl.

The half-breed was not moved by the compliment, and gazed at the speaker with a stolid face.

"I hope this air chance of making your acquaintance ain't going to cost us too dear," Dublin Mike observed, shrewdly.

"Well, that depends more upon you two than it does on me," the outlaw replied.

"I am a very quiet and easy-going fellow when everything goes rightly, but like many another man of my kind, when I get ugly I am a terror."

"Of course, both you and the lady here are too sensible not to know that we toll-gatherers haven't taken the trouble to bring you to this ranch of ours for nothing."

Dublin Mike nodded, as much as to say he was not surprised by this information.

"We have got a little game to play, and we reckon we are just the boys who can play it, right up to the handle, too!"

"Now, do either of you two happen to know a rustler named Sioux Sam?"

Dublin Mike appeared amazed, plainly betraying by this face that he knew the man, and even

the stolid half-breed maiden showed by the quick flashes of her dark eyes that Sioux Sam and she were not strangers.

"Aha!" exclaimed the outlaw chief in a tone which betrayed great satisfaction, "I see by your faces that you are both acquainted with this cow-puncher."

"I suppose you know too that Sioux Sam is in Red Bluffs."

Dublin Mike cast a quick glance at the Snow-White Dove as much as to ask whether he should admit the truth or not.

The road-agent leader was on the watch though and detected the look.

"Oh, come, none of that, you know!" he exclaimed.

"No use, Mister Billy Taylor, to attempt to pull the wool over my eyes, for I am a man who is up to snuff, every time!"

"I know that you are going to Red Bluffs expecting to meet Sioux Sam there!" he declared.

"I am posted in regard to the little love affair between him and Miss Snow White Dove. The fact is, Sam and myself are tip-top friends; we got pretty full together last night, and he let out he expected this lady every day; and he owned right up that it was on the programme for a wedding to take place as soon as you got in town, miss."

The stolid face of the Indian girl gave no indication of how she was affected by this announcement, but there was a peculiar gleam in the dark eyes which were fixed so steadily on the masked face of the outlaw chief.

In her heart the Ute princess believed that the stranger was speaking falsely.

Of course she had not known Sioux Sam long, and yet she was satisfied from what she had seen of him that he was not the man to allow himself to be so far overcome with liquor as to mention her name in a public place and reveal, too, to a stranger, the tender tie which existed between them.

"Darned if I thought Sioux Sam would give the snap away!" Dublin Mike exclaimed, as if he was annoyed at the imprudence of the young man.

"Well, he was a little full as I said," the road-agent chief remarked.

"Now, I will admit freely I am a man who is on the make, and when I got wind of this picnic I thought I saw a chance to make some ducats out of it, so I fixed things to capture you two; Sioux Sam gave me the points, never thinking, of course, of what I would be up to."

"Now, Miss Snow White Dove, you are helpless in my power, and if you want to ever see your lover again you must do as I say."

"What in thunder is your little game anyway?" exclaimed Dublin Dan, as if bursting with curiosity.

"I want to know the secret of the Hidden Mine—the Utes' treasure-house, where they got the red bullets that they used when the whites first came into this part of the country."

A look of blank amazement appeared in Dublin Mike's features, but the girl's face was as stolid as that of a graven image.

"You possess that secret, Snow White Dove, and you must reveal it to me, for I want a chance to help myself to some of the nuggets."

"If you refuse to speak you shall never see Sioux Sam again!"

The girl shook her head slowly.

"I cannot reveal what does not exist," she said.

CHAPTER XI.

AN OBSTINATE WOMAN.

"WHAT do you mean by that?" exclaimed the road-agent leader, sternly.

"Exactly what I say," replied the girl, disdainfully, evidently not in the least impressed by the manner of the stranger.

"The story of the secret mine is a fable—no such thing exists."

"Bosh!" cried the outlaw, angrily, "I know better than that."

"The red bullets of your tribe used to bring in the golden nuggets, until they found that the whites were getting crazy over the matter, and then they stopped, for fear that all their hunting-grounds would be overrun by the pale-faces."

"It is an idle story, I tell you," the maiden replied.

"Ask any of the Utes, and they will tell you so."

"A long, long time ago, when I was a child, sometimes a few small nuggets—the red bullets which you speak of—would be found by some hunter in search of game, and he would bring them into the white settlements; but there is no

mine, and never was one. That is all an idle tale."

"Oh, I know better," the outlaw leader exclaimed, impatiently.

"You tell me to ask any of the Utes, but I know better than that. I understand exactly how the land lies, and you cannot fool me with all your cunning."

"You are the princess of the Utes, the only child of their last great chief, and the only soul in the tribe who knows the secret of the Hidden Mine."

"I see that it is useless for me to continue to deny, since you will not believe me!" exclaimed the maiden in scorn. "But it is the truth, and if you should keep me here until doomsday you will not be one bit the wiser at the end than in the beginning."

"Oho, you are going to be obstinate, then?" the road-agent leader exclaimed.

"Well, we will see who has the stronger will, you or I."

"At present I think the advantage of the situation is on my side. You are my prisoner, and I will keep you here until you reveal to me the secret which I desire to know."

"Sioux Sam will wait for you in Red Bluffs a long time unless you conclude to alter your mind and speak."

"I cannot tell what I do not know!" the girl replied, as coolly and indifferently as though she was not in the power of a ruffianly gang.

"I will give you a little time to reflect upon the matter. When you come to think it over you may change your mind," the road-agent remarked.

"And you, Mister Billy Taylor, if you are wise, you will counsel this obstinate creature to yield to my wishes, for it will be the worse for both of you if she don't."

"When you get through talking to her you will find your quarters ready for you on the opposite side of the house."

And with this remark the outlaw withdrew.

Dublin Mike shook his head in a dismal way after their jailer had departed.

"I tell yer, we are in an awful scrape!" he exclaimed.

"Yes; this man is a desperate villain."

"Well, you see what kind of a hole a man gets into sometimes, just by being good-natured!" Dublin Mike remarked, in an extremely doleful way.

"If I hadn't gone in to help Sioux Sam and you in your love scrape, I wouldn't be in this fix now."

"This man lies when he says that Sioux Sam revealed to him that he was waiting for me in Red Bluffs!" the girl exclaimed, abruptly.

"Oh, no; I reckon not," Dublin Mike replied, a little disconcerted by this unexpected declaration, although he had such a perfect command over himself that he did not show it.

"How could he have known anything about the matter if Sioux Sam didn't tell him?"

"I do not know, but I feel sure that Sioux Sam did not reveal it to him."

"Oh, I reckon he must, for I don't see how he could have found it out otherwise."

"But, I say, we are in an awful tight place hyer, and if I were you I would git out of it if I could."

"What's the harm anyway if you do tell the secret of this hyer mine?" the man continued, in his most persuasive manner.

"Your Ute tribe is about all broken up now; that's only a handful of you left; the whites have over-run all your old hunting grounds, and what does it matter if you do give the secret of the mine away? I'll tell you how the thing might be worked!" he exclaimed, as if the idea had just come to him.

"Tell me whar the mine is located and I will drive a bargain with this galoot!" Dublin Mike continued, rubbing his hands together and winking, cunningly, at the girl as though he thought he had struck a brilliant scheme.

"It will not take much gold to git us out of his clutches."

"He talks big now about the mine and how he wants to gobble the hull business, but if I should go to him and say, that ain't no mine—that story is a fraud, but the gal knows whar her old dad buried a lot of the red bullets, so as to keep the bucks from giving 'em to the whites, and I reckon, from what she says, that that's four or five thousand dollars' worth, the odds are big he would jump at the chance to collar the wealth, and be glad to let us go."

"Then, you know, you could join Sioux Sam in Red Bluffs, and would be able to give him the rest of the gold, for that is your idea, I s'pose."

With her lustrous, dark eyes the half-breed maiden looked Dublin Mike full in the face for

a moment, as though she would read his very soul, and then she shook her head.

"I see that you do not place any more faith in my words than this stranger," she observed.

"It is remarkable how ready men are to believe these idle tales of secret mines."

"Have not the whites overrun the whole country once owned by the Utes?"

"Is there a valley into which the eager gold-seekers have not penetrated?"

"Do you think that if any rich deposit of precious metals existed, these eager hunters would not have discovered the treasure?"

The girl spoke apparently in the most perfect good faith, but Dublin Mike felt sure she was deceiving him.

In spite of all the pains he had taken to win her confidence, it was plain she did not feel disposed to trust him.

He was disgusted at his failure, but he concealed his annoyance by putting on an anxious look, shaking his head, gravely.

"Well, I'm sorry that you can't fix the matter up in that way, for I am afraid that thar is a rough time ahead for us if we don't make this galoot satisfied. He's an ugly customer! Any one kin see that with half an eye, and I tell yer, a feller of his stamp had jist as lief kill as not!"

"Heaven will rescue us from his power; the Great Ruler above will not let this villain triumph," the girl replied.

Dublin Mike shook his head.

"Well, I hope so," he observed, "but sometimes such durned galoots as this feller seem to have things all their own way."

"I'll go out and have a talk with him, and see if I can't get the cuss to go light on us."

Then Dublin Mike withdrew.

A flash of fire came from the dark eyes of the girl.

"The villain!" she exclaimed, "it was he who betrayed me into this snare!"

"I begin to understand the plot now! I have been deceived from the beginning!"

"It was all a deep-laid and carefully planned scheme to lure me to Colorado."

"The man is a snake in the grass; he is in league with the other."

"In some way they managed to learn of my love for Sioux Sam, and they took advantage of that passion to lure me into the trap."

"But it shall not profit them much; I will die before I betray the secret of my tribe!"

And from the way in which the girl spoke, it was plain that she had fully considered the consequences and determined to brave them.

The road-agent captain—who, I presume the reader has already guessed, was Nick Spader—was waiting for Dublin Mike in the other apartment of the cabin, which was also illuminated by a candle.

Old Nick had removed his mask, and was waiting patiently for Dublin Mike to make his appearance.

"Well, what luck?" he asked, the moment the other entered.

"None at all," was Dublin Mike's reply, as he helped himself to a seat.

"She is obstinate?"

"As a mule!"

"That's bad."

"Yes, it isn't going to be as easy a matter as we thought. This girl has all the obstinacy of her race, and I reckon she will make a tough fight afore she gives in."

"We will have to bring her to a confession in some way," Nick Spader remarked. "It will not do to be baffled by a woman's obstinacy."

"Oh, no, but it will be a tough job," Dublin Mike observed, with a shake of his head.

"I thought that she was so crazy after Sioux Sam that we could work the trick pretty easily."

"I reckoned, you know, that when we got her hyer, just within reach of her lover, so to speak, that rather than be kept away from him, she would jump at any chance, but I am really afraid she has smoked the game, for these Injuns are dead runnung!"

And then he repeated the doubting words of the girl.

"Maybe she has smelt out the trick," Nick Spader observed, thoughtfully.

"As you say, these red-skins are as cunning as serpents sometimes."

"Thar ain't the least doubt about that, and I am really afraid this gal has a suspicion that some game has been played upon her."

"Well, it doesn't matter much, so long as she is safe in our hands," Nick Spader remarked.

"We must go slow for awhile, and you get in all the sweet talk you can. We will give her time, you know, and finally, if we find she is

obstinate, we will put the screws on—we will try what hunger and thirst will do."

As will be seen, Old Nick was as ruthless a ruffian as could well be found in all the wilds of the West.

Three days passed away, but the girl remained firm, and then, Nick Spader having to visit Red Bluffs for supplies, returned with startling news.

Sioux Sam had been in Red Bluffs, and making inquiries in regard to the Ute princess.

CHAPTER XII.

A DEEP-LAID SCHEME.

FOR a moment Dublin Mike was astounded by the intelligence.

"Kinder astonishes you, eh?" Nick Spader observed, with a grim smile.

"Indeed it does."

"And what in Satan's name does it mean?" the desperado exclaimed with a frown.

"Durned if I know."

"Just by the luckiest chance in the world, I happened to hear the news, for the fellow was not in Red Bluffs, but absent in search of the girl."

"Thar isn't any doubt that he is arter the gal!"

"Not the slightest! And he is accompanied, too, by a man who is a very bloodhound when he gets upon a trail."

"You don't say so!" cried Dublin Mike.

"It is the truth, and I have no doubt you know the man, for he possesses a great reputation here in this section."

"What is his handle?"

"Cool Colorado."

"Great guns! You don't mean it?" exclaimed the other, evidently deeply impressed by the disclosure.

"Yes, it is the truth. I see the fellow is no stranger to you."

"Oh, no; and I reckon that 'bout everybody who has hustled around Colorado much has heered tell on the critter. He is a terror, and no mistake."

"There isn't the least doubt about that!" Nick Spader observed, in a tone of firm conviction.

"It is said that Cool Colorado is a son of the famous Wild Bill, and I reckon it is the truth," Nick Spader observed.

"Yes, he's jest as desperate and willing to take big risks as ever Wild Bill was, but he isn't anywhar near as headstrong and impetuous as his dad; on the contrary, he is as cool as a cucumber, and that is whar he gits his name."

"He is a dangerous foe, and there isn't a man in all the wilds of the West, from General McCook of Denver down, that I wouldn't rather have on my track," Nick Spader remarked with a grave face.

"That's so, that's so!" Dublin Mike observed, shaking his head doubtfully.

"Why, it hardly looks possible; but that fellow hunted me clear from Colorado to the East, and he managed to run me down, too, although I turned and doubled on my track like a hunted fox!"

"It's like the man! That's the reputation he has. When he gits on a man's trail he sticks to it as closely as the hungry wolf to the track of a wounded buffalo."

"Yes, he ran me down, and it was in escaping from the officers whom he put on my trail, that I leaped into the river and encountered you."

"I see, I see."

"He's a natural-born bloodhound, and there isn't a doubt in my mind that it is through him Sioux Sam has got on the right track."

"Not a doubt on it."

"This Cool Colorado has marvelous instincts in the detective line. Why, he jumped clear from Colorado to New York, and hunted me up in the little Long Island village where I had taken refuge.

"And now, in this case, there isn't the least doubt in my mind that he has detected our game—has jumped clear from New York to Red Bluffs, thinking to be able to spot us.

"Of course, as an old resident of the State, the yarn of the Hidden Mine—the secret of which is possessed only by the Ute princess—is known to him, and when he heard of the girl's disappearance, he immediately jumped to the conclusion she had been decoyed to the West by some one after the hidden gold."

"Do you s'pose he got on the track at Gunnison?" Dublin Mike asked, anxiously. "You know we halted there two days while you organized the gang."

"No, I don't hardly think he did, for you were both well disguised."

"He is going on the idea that as the mine is supposed to be in the wild country to the north of Red Bluffs, the girl and her captors will naturally be somewhere in that region."

"A mighty good guess, too!" Dublin Mike exclaimed.

"And I say, old man, we must be on the lookout, or else these galoots may jump in on us when we least expect it."

"Yes, there is danger of that, of course; but I thought the matter over while I was on the road from Red Bluffs, and came to the conclusion that in this matter we ought to take the bull by the horns."

"Yes, yes," and Dublin Mike nodded his head approvingly. "I reckon I git your idee. Instead of our waiting hyer fer Cool Colorado and Sioux Sam to jump on us, you propose to jump on them."

"That is the game!" Nick Spader replied.

"Sioux Sam I don't know much about; he has the reputation of being a good man, and I don't doubt he is able to hold his own under ordinary circumstances; but this Cool Colorado is a regular fire-eater, and if we give him any chance for his life, he will be apt to make it extremely lively for us."

"You bet!" cried Dublin Mike, in a tone of firm conviction.

"Now, our little game is to fix the thing so that all the advantages will be on our side. We must not give these two rustlers any shew at all."

"You are talking good, solid sense now!"

"We have changed our appearance so much since we left the East that it is dollars to cents that Sioux Sam will not recognize us.

"The programme is for us to take two of our men, leaving one here to guard the girl, and hunt these fellows up in Red Bluffs, where they are making their headquarters."

"I see, I see," Dublin Mike remarked, paying the closest attention to the explanation.

"They are stopping at the Metropolitan Saloon, Tommy Doyle's place, and some time during the evening will be certain to be in the bar-room."

"We must go in quietly, one by one, have a drink at the bar and note where our men are; then we must get in their neighborhood, and I will manage to provoke a quarrel with them; just as we begin to get hot, I'll say, 'Oh, well, I didn't come in here to pick a fuss with anybody, so let's all take a drink.' That will be the signal for you and the boys to pull your 'guns' and let Cool Colorado and Sioux Sam have the contents as soon as possible."

"Mighty nice scheme!" Dublin Mike observed, and then he chuckled and rubbed his hands together.

"And it will work, too—you kin bet your life on it!"

"Yes, because neither one of the two can possibly get onto the trick until the trap is sprung," Old Nick observed, shrewdly.

"As smart as this Cool Colorado undoubtedly is, it will not be possible for him to suspect when I begin to quarrel with him and Sam that I have three friends in the crowd ready to pull on him at a certain signal."

"And, in order to still further divert suspicion, I shall make out that I have been drinking pretty freely; when some men get too much benzine on board they are apt to be inclined to quarrel, and so my pitching onto these two will not look at all out of the way."

"It will work! It will work, you kin bet all your wealth on it!" Dublin Mike exclaimed, enthusiastically.

"The chances are big, you know, that when the guns are pulled, and the shooting begins, the crowd will scatter. It isn't any of their funeral, and none of them will be apt to want to remain and risk the chance of stopping a bullet intended for some other man."

"We must do the work up quick and the moment we have laid out our men, skedaddle for our horses."

"We'll have them tied right outside the door, and the odds are big that if we play the game right, we can plug our men, get on our horses, and be out of the town before the citizens will really know what has happened."

"Oh, it is a bang-up scheme and the thing can't help going through as slick as a whistle!"

"We must set about it this very night!" Nick Spader declared.

"Everything depends upon our getting in our whack at the two before they discover we are in the neighborhood."

"If they once get on our track, it will be apt to make them cautious, and then they might be on their guard against any little surprise-party of this kind."

"That's so, as sure as you're born!"

And so it was decided that the attempt should be made that very night.

The arch plotter reasoned shrewdly, as the reader has seen.

The two trackers had jumped directly from New York city to Colorado, and the first halt they had made was in Gunnison, that lively town being the gateway to the Red Bluffs region, and north of Red Bluffs was the wild and desolate country, once the home of that branch of the Ute tribe to which the Snow White Dove belonged.

And, somewhere amid this rude and sterile waste, cut up by small water-courses and rough ravines, was the Hidden Mine whose secret had been so jealously guarded by the red-skins for so many years.

At Gunnison the trailers made searching inquiries in regard to the game upon whose track they were pressing so hotly.

And, although both the Ute princess and the cunning white man, who was misleading her, had carefully disguised themselves, yet as all strangers—particularly females—are closely scrutinized in such a town as Gunnison, the searchers after knowledge managed to get on the right track.

The clever device of the plotters, though, in procuring horses, instead of going by the stage-coach, threw the pursuers off the track, although they were only some twenty-four hours behind them.

The delay at Gunnison while Nick Spader organized his road-agent band had enabled the trackers to catch up.

But after leaving Gunnison the two pards were completely baffled.

No trace of the fugitives could they discover and so they decided to make Red Bluffs their headquarters while they scoured the surrounding country, for they were satisfied that the game they sought was not many miles from the mining-camp.

As the reader knows they were correct in this supposition, and were in fact very "hot" on the trail.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SNARE.

THE Metropolitan Saloon, "Tommy Doyle's Shebang," as it was popularly called, was the leading hotel of Red Bluffs.

It did not differ materially from the usual shanty hotel, common to the mining-camps up in the hills, and so we will spare the reader a detailed description.

It was a lodging-house, restaurant, and saloon combined—the saloon part being decidedly the largest, and by far the most profitable.

The hotel office was in the saloon and the room was the general loafing place of the town, especially at night when the miners had quit work.

On the particular evening of which we write the saloon was well-filled, and the occupants, between drinks, were discussing the gossip of the day.

In a corner of the room where the hotel office was situated, Cool Colorado and Sioux Sam, both rigged up in cowboy style, lounged against the counter, chatting with the proprietor of the place, the popular Tommy Doyle, who was a middle-aged, undersized Irishman of a decidedly jovial disposition.

Both Cool Colorado and Sioux Sam were old acquaintances of the landlord, having known him when he kept a saloon in Gunnison, which was before the "strike" in Red Bluffs had been made, and that now flourishing mining-camp had neither a local habitation nor a name.

The trailers had confined their mission to the landlord, for Tommy Doyle was a man who could be trusted, and they had calculated as he was the owner of the most popular resort in the camp, that he would be the most likely man in the town to hear any news.

Doyle, eager to oblige any of his friends, had made cautious inquiries, but was not able to give any information.

Strangers were coming and going all the time, but no one of them answered to the description which the trackers had obtained in Gunnison of the man who was in company with the girl whom they believed to be the Ute princess.

The two pards were not discouraged though they hardly expected to strike the trail right at the beginning.

Both of our heroes were well mounted and they had put in their time since arriving in the mining-camp in riding around the country, stopping at all the little mining-camps up and down the valley in which Red Bluffs was situated, and in the foot-hills near the town. And

everywhere they went they pushed their cautious inquiries.

But they had not thought of searching up along the hillside, on which the ranch of the outlaws was situated.

There wasn't any settlers in that neighborhood.

Prospector after prospector had explored the hillside without discovering any signs of precious metals, not even hunters, for there wasn't any game in the neighborhood.

"Cheer up, Sam, don't let your spirits go down," shouted the landlord, who prided himself upon his vocal abilities.

"Oh, that is all right!" Sioux 'Sam replied. "I am not worrying about the matter, Colorado, and I will strike the trail one of these days, for that is the kind of men we are."

"Yes, it is too soon yet to give up," Cool Colorado observed.

"There isn't much doubt that our game is up in this region, somewhere."

"Ten miles to the north of Red Bluffs are the Bad Lands, the old Ute stamping-ground, to which the red-skins always fled when they got into a tussle with the whites, and in that wild region they were always able to evade pursuit."

"Now, according to the way I have always heard the yarn told, up in the Bad Lands, somewhere, is this secret mine, and as to get at the hidden treasure is undoubtedly the game of the man, or men, who persuaded the Snow White Dove to quit the East, it is as certain as anything can be, that the party is in the neighborhood of Red Bluffs somewhere."

"Undoubtedly!" exclaimed the landlord, who was a shrewd fellow and had been following the argument of the scout closely.

"Oh, you will be able to put salt on the tails of your birds one of these days, if you only have patience," Doyle continued.

By this time the saloon was pretty well filled, and the bar was doing a rushing trade.

Nick Spader and Dublin Mike, rigged out to resemble honest, hard-working miners, and two of their road-agent band had entered the room.

They carelessly gathered in a corner of the apartment, lounging there as if they were all strangers to each other, and Nick Spader took occasion to direct the attention of the rest to the two young men talking to Johnny Doyle, the landlord.

It was hardly possible to make any mistake about the two scouts, for they were the only cow-punchers in the apartment—the only two men dressed in the frontier garb of buckskin.

"There's our men, and as luck will have it, they are away from the crowd," Old Nick remarked.

"We will be able to get at them without any danger of getting anybody else mixed up in the fight, which is something we must avoid if we can."

"Tommy Doyle is right in the way, though," Dublin Mike observed.

"Yes, if he should be in his present position when we open fire, the chances are big that we will plug him for keeps."

"We don't want to do that, you know, if we can help it," Dublin Mike observed.

"Tommy is very popular among the boys, and if we should lay him out, it would be apt to kick up an awful row."

"Yes, yes, that is so; the others are strangers, and it wouldn't matter so much," Old Nick remarked.

"Then they are cow-punchers too, and the average miner don't go much on these cowboy rustlers," Nick Spader continued. "So if these two have their toes turned up in a skirmish, it would not be apt to raise much of a disturbance."

"I'll get Tommy Doyle out of the way," Dublin Mike remarked.

"I'll call him over toward the bar and ask him if he knows of a good place for a man to get a job."

"That is a good idea," Nick Spader commented.

"And then the moment I let go of him, somebody else will be sure to tickle his ribs, and then you kin get in your fine work on the pards."

"All right! You go ahead and get Doyle out from behind that bar."

Dublin Mike nodded, and taking a round-about way slowly approached the landlord.

Old Nick seized upon the opportunity to speak a word of warning to the pair of ruffians who were lounging near, doing it in a cautious way so as not to attract attention.

"Now, boys, the fun will begin pretty soon," he said.

"Get your revolvers ready—have 'em cocked

in your belts so that when you pull you can open fire at once.

"These two cow-punchers are first class hustlers, you know, and if you give them the least bit of a show, they will be certain to make an awful fight."

The road-agents nodded with a confident air, as much as to say they knew how to do the trick.

"Go fer your position, boys, and don't forget the signal is, 'let's have a drink!'"

Again the men nodded and then sauntered away.

Like Dublin Mike they did not go in a direct line but adopted a circular course, one to the right, and the other to the left.

Dublin Mike had beckoned to the landlord, and he joined the disguised ruffians by the bar where they stood conversing.

Both of the pards had noticed the stranger, casting only a casual glance at him though, but there was something about Dublin Mike, despite his wonderful disguise which set Sioux Sam to thinking.

"I say, Colorado, do you notice that fellow yonder talking with Doyle?" he said.

"Yes, what of him?"

"It seems to me as if I had seen that fellow before, somewhere."

Cool Colorado took a good look at the man.

"His appearance seems rather familiar to me, but then there are so many toughs of his stamp that a man runs across in a year it is pretty hard to remember any one particular man."

"That is so, and I don't believe that my remembrance of foes is as good as yours either, so if you can't place the fellow is it any wonder that I can't?"

Dublin Mike only held the landlord in conversation for a moment, and then sauntered up to the counter to get a drink.

As the conspirators had anticipated, another man immediately button-holed Tommy Doyle, so he was prevented from returning to his former position.

By this time both of the road-agents were within a few yards of the two pards.

The moment had come for Old Nick to play his part in the drama.

He advanced to the bar and got a drink, then, turning away, assuming the air of a man who had drank more fire-water than he could conveniently carry, he approached the scout and pretended to discover them, all of a sudden.

"Darn my old boots if thar ain't two dandy cow-punchers!" he exclaimed in a loud tone, as he halted within a couple of yards of the pards and, placing his hand upon his thighs half-squatted down, as though anxious to get a good look at them.

The loud tone, as well as the nature of the exclamation, immediately attracted the attention of every one in the saloon.

The gossips stopped short in their talk, the men at the bar paused with their glasses half-way between the counter and their mouths, and all gazed at the speaker.

From the peculiar intonation which the disguised outlaw chief threw into his speech, there was hardly a man in the room but immediately jumped to the conclusion there was likely to be trouble.

As had been said, there wasn't much love lost between the miners and the cowboys.

The gay and festive cattle-punchers were wont, once in a while, when on a "tear," to ride into the mining-camps, and proceed to make it extremely lively for the occupants thereof.

So there was really a feeling against the cattle-men, and the prospect of trouble between a miner and the cowboys excited general attention.

CHAPTER XIV.

A LIVELY TIME.

OLD NICK's disguise was so perfect that neither one of the young men suspected that he was aught but what he appeared to be—a middle-aged miner, a hard customer, considerably under the influence of liquor.

Now both Cool Colorado and Sioux Sam were not men inclined to rush a quarrel, particularly with a man of this kind, but his tone was so offensive that the remark could not be allowed to pass unnoticed.

"See here, my friend, you had better not open your mouth so wide, or you may catch cold," Cool Colorado observed.

"Oh, hear the rooster crow!" exclaimed the outlaw, in a tone of great contempt, straightening himself up as he spoke.

"If you don't go over and mind your own

business, maybe you will feel the spur of the rooster in a way you won't like," the young scout retorted.

"Say, you don't own this hyar shanty," exclaimed Old Nick, with a comic assumption of dignity, playing the character he was assuming to perfection.

"No, nor do I pretend to, but I own myself, and I have too much respect for a gentleman about my size to stand any nonsense," Cool Coolado replied, tartly.

"Now you had better vamose the ranch, or else you will get into trouble!"

"Go outside and shoot your mouth off to the moon, for if you give me any more talk I will warm your ears for you!"

"You will!" cried the disguised outlaw.

"Yes, I will, and right speedily, too!"

Both of the scouts had their eyes on the man, and if he had attempted to pull a weapon their "guns" would have been out instanter.

The fellow, though, did not seem to have any idea of such a movement, for he did not make a motion toward the revolver which was plainly visible, buckled to his waist.

By this time Tommy Doyle thought that it was in order for him to interfere.

He knew the scouts of old, and fully understood that two such men as Cool Colorado and Sioux Sam were fully a match for a round dozen of average miners.

"Come, come, gents, we don't want any trouble here!" the landlord exclaimed.

"I don't know who you are, stranger, nor where you come from," he continued, addressing Nick Spader, "but I can tell you that you have got in the wrong shop when you try to kick up a disturbance in the Metropolitan Saloon.

"We don't allow any rows in here. If you are dying for a fight go outside and there you can fight as long as you like!"

"Who's a-trying for to kick up a row!" exclaimed the disguised outlaw.

"Tain't me! I'm jest as peaceable a man as walks on two legs!"

"All I did was to sling a leetle joke at these dandy cow-punchers, and I don't see as they had any call for to get up on their ear 'bout my talk, anyway!"

"I reckon times are gitting mighty queer when a man can't git off a leetle joke without being accused of trying to raise a row."

"I didn't come in hyer to kick up no fuss, no, sir-ee, that ain't the kind of man I am."

"I am jest as quiet as they make 'em."

And then, pausing for a moment as if to take breath, but in reality to cast a sly glance out of the corners of his eyes, so as to be sure his gang were all in position, ready for the fray, he continued:

"Come on, all of you, I meant no harm—come on and we'll take a drink!"

Old Nick, Dublin Mike and the two road-agents were quick to pull their revolvers, but no quicker than Cool Colorado and Sioux Sam.

Like the skillful swordsman they had been watching the eyes of the supposed miner, and in his orbs they saw danger written—the attack foretold—before the signal was given.

Thanks to the precaution taken by Old Nick to warn his men to have their revolvers ready-cocked, the assailant would have had an advantage if the two scouts had not been provided with double-acting revolvers—self-cockers, a single pull both raising and lowering the hammer.

And so four shots echoed through the saloon so close together that they seemed like one long report.

There was a rush of the people in the place for the doors and windows.

The crowd was panic-stricken; they didn't care how they got out, so they escaped from what seemed likely to be a slaughter-pen.

In the wild rush the lights were overturned and extinguished, plunging the room in utter darkness.

Pell-mell into the open air rushed the throng, the greater part of them wild with fright.

In the hurry and confusion no man knew how the fight had gone.

Whether the strangers, who had so unexpectedly pulled their "guns" on the two scouts, had succeeded in their murderous designs, or whether the young men had laid out the attackers.

There was a bright moon, so that all objects in the street were distinctly visible.

Four horses were tethered without, three men rushed through the crowd with smoking pistols in their hands and sprung upon the backs of three of the steeds.

The three were Nick Spader, Dublin Mike and one of the road-agents.

Spader was evidently hurt, for he staggered

as he ran, and it was as much as he could do to get upon his horse.

Despite this fact, though, the three mounted in wonderfully quick time, and away went the steeds at the top of their speed.

The tethering-pins, to which were attached the lariats that held the horses, had not been driven firmly in the ground, so that the moment the riders urged the beasts onward the fastenings did not hold them.

Dublin Mike was particular to grasp the fourth horse by the bridle, so as not to leave the brute behind.

This was done to prevent the pursuers—who, of course, would give immediate chase—from using the horse.

"You are hurt, Nick!" Dublin Mike cried, the moment the start was made, noticing that his companion was reeling in the saddle.

"Yes; the son of a gun gave it to me in the side!" replied Old Nick, between his firm-set teeth.

"I reckon it ain't so very bad, though it does seem to take all the strength out of me."

"An inch or two further up would have been apt to have settled my hash for all time to come."

"Can you hold on all right?" Dublin Mike asked, anxiously.

"Oh, yes; I am worth a dozen dead men!" the outlaw chief cried, defiantly.

"Jimmy is done for, I reckon," Dublin Mike observed.

"Yes, I saw him go down, plugged as clean as a whistle."

"Both of the cowboys dropped."

"A trick to escape our bullets, I reckon. I don't think either one of them was hurt, curse 'em!" cried Old Nick, angrily.

These few words passed between the pair with the utmost rapidity, and at this point the conversation was interrupted by the opening of fire upon them.

As Nick Spader had guessed, neither one of the young men had suffered materially in the fight, although both were slightly wounded.

A bullet had grazed Cool Colorado's cheek, and Sioux Sam had a slight flesh-wound in the shoulder.

The unfortunate road-agent, though, had been shot through the heart and instantly killed by a snap-shot fired by Sioux Sam's experienced hand, and, as Old Nick had remarked, Cool Colorado's bullet had come within an inch of snapping his thread of life in twain.

The scouts had dropped to the floor just as they fired.

They understood, the moment the attack began, that it was a pre-arranged affair, and that they were beset by enemies.

There might be a dozen confederates in the saloon for all they knew, for the attack was sprung upon them so quickly that they had no time to count the number of their assailants.

And so it happened that they were the last to leave the saloon; but the moment they gained the open air and saw the baffled road-agents riding off at their best speed, they immediately gave chase.

Both of the young men were remarkably fleet runners, and as it took a few moments for the horses to get into their stride the scouts were able to get within range.

For just about half a minute they got the chance to empty their revolvers at the fugitives and then the horses carried them out of range.

A half-a-dozen shots they fired and the bullets did considerable execution.

Dublin Mike got a leaden missile in the fleshy part of his left arm, which made him swear in the most frightful manner; the lower part of Nick Spader's right ear was shot away, thus marking him for life, and the horse of the road-agent—Arkansaw Bill as the man was called—was mortally wounded.

Down went the beast on his knees, pitching his rider over his head in the most uncanny mauler.

"Arkansaw is done for!" Dublin Mike exclaimed as he urged on his steed to its best speed.

"Yes, I reckon that tumble has broken his neck, but we're out of range now, and mighty lucky we are to get off as well as we have."

"This hyer has been the biggest kind of a failure, I reckon," Dublin Mike remarked reflectively.

"We can't know every time!"

The riders disappeared in the gloom, and although some of the miners, now grown strangely valorous since the assailants were in full retreat, ran after them for fully half a mile, discharging their weapons and whooping like lunatics, they did not succeed in doing them

any damage, although when they returned each and every man swore roundly that "he" had peppered the villains in a way that they would be apt to remember.

The two scouts were too old hands to keep up the pursuit the moment the fleeing men got out of range and they hastened to the side of the man who had been pitched over his horse's head.

The fellow lay perfectly motionless.

"Is he dead, think you?" Sioux Sam asked.

"I reckon he has cashed in his checks," Cool Colorado replied.

Just then a half a dozen of the miners rushed up, brandishing their weapons and crying:

"Lynch him—lynch him!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE PRISONER.

"HOLD on, hold on, fellow-citizens!" Cool Colorado interposed.

"We will not have any lynching just now, if you please," he continued.

"In the first place, I reckon the man is dead, and if he isn't I claim him as my prisoner; and there will not be any lynching until the man has a trial, so we can find out something about him."

As we have said, some of the citizens had become extremely courageous now that the fight was over, and a couple took it upon themselves to give the scout "a piece of their minds."

"See hyer! that ain't no kind of way to talk to us!" the fellow exclaimed, blusteringly and he laid his hand, significantly, upon the butt of his revolver, which he had just shoved back into its holster.

"No, I want you to understand we hyer miners don't allow no cowboys to run this town!" chimed in another.

Cool Colorado's blood was a little heated by the contest in which he had played so prominent a part and he was not in the humor to stand any nonsense.

Like the old and experienced plainsman the first thing he had done the moment the fight ended, was to put fresh cartridges in his revolver, so he was fully prepared for war.

He was prompt to act.

Out came his revolvers as quick as a flash, and in the twinkling of an eye he had both of the men "covered."

"Get out of this or I'll shoot you down with as little mercy as though you were a pair of mad dogs!" he exclaimed, sternly.

The men fairly turned pale, for they saw that the young man was fully in earnest, and there was not the least doubt in their minds he would be as good as his word if they attempted to disobey the command, and so, muttering that they didn't mean to "run up ag'in' him," the pair slunk away.

The rest of the miners set up a shout of derision for the crowd always like to be on the winning side.

While this little incident was transpiring Sioux Sam had knelt by the side of the dismounted road-agent, and proceeded to ascertain the man's condition.

The fellow was not dead, merely stunned by the shock of the fall, and by the time that Cool Colorado had succeeded in getting rid of the two miners, he began to show signs of consciousness.

"He's all right," Sioux Sam announced. "Got an ugly fall, that is all."

"Well, I am glad to hear it!" his pard exclaimed.

"For I have a curiosity to know all the particulars in regard to this little surprise party. The attack was evidently a put-up job to wipe us out, and I would like to know who was running the game."

Inside of five minutes the man recovered sufficiently to sit up.

Meanwhile the citizens had been talking over the matter, and it was the general opinion that Judge Lynch ought to be called upon to take charge of the case.

Warned by the resolute way though in which the young scout had resisted the attempt of the two miners to interfere with the prisoner, the crowd selected Tommy Doyle for their spokesman, and delegated him to talk to Cool Colorado in regard to the matter.

"The boys have been discussing this fellow's case," remarked the landlord, "and it is the general opinion that we ought to form a Lynch court and try this galoot off-hand."

"Well, I think the idea is a good one, and I, for one, am heartily in favor of it," the plainsman replied, immediately.

"So am I!" exclaimed Sioux Sam.

"And as I reckon you are as good a man as

there is in the town for the office, I nominate you for Judge Lynch," Cool Colorado continued, in a tone loud enough to reach the ears of the citizens, who were collected in groups a few yards off.

This suggestion was received with immediate favor.

"Yes, yes, Tommy Doyle for Judge Lynch!" cried one of the representative men, and the rest took up the shout.

The landlord "reckoned" that they might find a better man in the camp than himself for the important office, but the crowd didn't think so, and he consented to serve.

"I will try and run the game right up to the handle," he remarked.

"I will do my best to show to the world that we are peaceable and law-abiding citizens here in Red Bluffs, and that our respect for law and order is only equaled by the durned speed with which we mete out justice to any galoot who thinks he is big enough to come into this hyer camp and paint the town red."

This speech met with general approval, and then, one old, gray-headed miner, suggested that as Cool Colorado's bullet had been the one to slay the stranger's horse, and so give the man into their hands, the half-breed ought to have some say in running the thing.

"Well, I will be the district attorney to put the fellow through," the scout suggested.

The throng approved of this idea, and as the man had not recovered sufficiently to know what he was about, it was resolved to proceed with the trial immediately.

The man was searched, all his weapons removed, his arms pinioned with a lariat, and then "Judge Lynch" announced that he was ready for trial.

The prisoner was a muscular fellow, with a hang-dog look, and when he was ordered to stand up and face Judge Lynch it was the general opinion that he was the ugliest-looking scoundrel the town of Red Bluffs had seen for many a day.

The fellow was game though, and despite the peril of his position he faced the crowd with a resolute air.

"Well, my man, you are in a pretty tight place," Tommy Doyle observed, in his official capacity of Judge Lynch.

"Mebbe I am, and, mebbe, I ain't," replied the fellow, insolently.

"Don't you try to cheek this hyer court!" cried Judge Lynch, sternly.

"Don't you go for to give me any guff or, blame me! if I don't hang you first and try you afterwards!"

"Wa-al, I reckon you can't do more than hang a man, anyway!" the fellow retorted.

"I don't know 'bout that! I reckon we kin dish up justice mighty fine in this hyer camp if we get a good ready on."

"Hanging ain't the only thing we kin do!"

"Oh, ain't it?" cried the ruffian, still full of bravado, yet evidently a little disturbed by the words of the judge.

"No, sir-ee, it ain't by a jugful!" Tommy Doyle declared.

"I want you to understand that when it comes to dealing out justice this hyer camp of Red Bluffs don't take a back seat for any two in Colorado."

"Oh, you are only talking, so as to make your mouth go!" exclaimed the fellow.

"You wait till a while ago and, mebbe, you will find out!" Judge Lynch declared.

"In the first place you kin just bet your bottom dollar that we kin put a man through in this camp as well as in any camp you ever struck."

"There is more than one way to kill a cat, and more ways to make a man wish he had never been born than to make him stretch hemp."

"For instance, there is such a thing as roasting a man over a slow fire."

The ruffian looked both amazed and disgusted.

"Then ag'in a man kin be torn asunder by wild hosses."

The eyes of the captive began to bulge.

"And then ag'in, a galoot who reckons he is a chief and is disposed to be ugly, kin be boiled in oil over a slow fire."

The man was visibly disturbed.

"Oh, bosh!" he cried, trying to put a bold face on the matter. "You are only trying to skeer me now!"

"Oh, no, we don't do business in that ar' way in this hyer camp."

"All I am trying to do is to let you see what is ahead on you, so you will have a chance to flee from the wrath to come."

"I don't want you, arter you land in the other world, to be able to make any complaints

that you were h'listed there so sudden that you didn't have no time to get your baggage checked.

"We are not going to ring in a cold deal on you, but give you a squar' show for your money, every time!"

"Wa-al, that is all I ax, anyway," growled the prisoner, sulkily.

"You are going to get it in Red Bluffs, every time!" the landlord declared, in the most impressive manner.

"Now, then, to come right down to business, what is your handle?"

"Arkansaw Bill."

"Well, you're no credit to the State," commented Judge Lynch.

"You are a stranger hyer, I reckon?"

"I reckon I am."

"Where are you from last?"

"Gunnison."

"Did they run you out of the town?"

"No, they didn't!" snarled the prisoner, angrily.

"Didn't stay there long enough, eh, for the folks to get properly introduced to you?"

"I reckon Gunnison will hunk on me as big as any man she's got inter the town!" the fellow declared.

"Well, if the town did, I reckon the chances are big that Gunnison would lose her wealth, every time!"

"What is your business?"

"Miner and general speculator."

"Toll-gatherer, too, I reckon, if the road is a lonely one and you can get your drop on your man," observed Judge Lynch, shrewdly.

"I reckon you can't prove that!" cried the man, defiantly.

"You jest wait until we get through with you, and, mebbe, your weak nerves will be astonished by the things we can prove!"

A scowl of defiance was the only answer the fellow deigned to make to this remark.

"Now, in regard to this hyer matter, how was it that you came to be mixed up in this fuss?" Judge Lynch asked.

"It was a free fight, wasn't it?" the prisoner cried.

"I reckon that when a man sees that a free fight is going to begin, he is justified in pulling his we'pon and going for the furst man he kin git a whack at, hey?"

"Ah, yes, but there wasn't any fight until you and the gang you was with begun it."

"I wasn't with no gang!" the man declared.

"I had just come into the town—a total stranger, and, I sw'ar, I didn't know a soul in the place!"

"I say, judge, let me have a hack at him for a moment," Cool Colorado interposed at this point.

CHAPTER XVI.

STRONG MEASURES.

"ALL right! Sail in your elephants!" Tommy Doyle exclaimed.

"Now see here, stranger, it isn't of the least bit of use for you to attempt to pull the wool over our eyes," Cool Colorado exclaimed sternly.

"Ain't trying to!" responded the prisoner, doggedly.

"Oh, yes you are, and the game will not work! It is all nonsense for you to try to make us believe that you don't know the other men who were mixed up with you in this affair, and that you sailed in merely because you thought there was going to be a free fight."

"So I did."

"Nary time! That story won't go down, and it isn't of any use for you to try to lie out of the matter."

"I am too old a hand at this business not to be able to see the game you played."

"There were four of you in this row. One was the tall fellow who called the landlord over and spoke to him at the bar—"

"Asked me if I knew where he could get a job!" Tommy Doyle interposed at this point.

"Said he was a stranger hyer, and anxious to git something to do."

"That was a dodge to get you away from the neighborhood where Sioux Sam and I were standing, so t'at the gang could get at us," the scout declared.

"I can see the whole thing now, just about as well as though I'd been in the game."

"There was four of you all told, as I said before. The tall fellow was one, you were two, the other man on the right, who was shot and plugged for keeps, was three, and the man who pretended to be drunk and had the words with me was the fourth."

"You and the man who was killed, had your

pistols all ready cocked in your belts, so that you could draw and open fire on Sioux Sam and myself the moment you got the signal from the man who accosted me, and that signal was, 'let's take a drink!'

"I reckon you know a durned sight more 'bout it than I do," the man exclaimed, doggedly.

"Oh, you murdering villain!" exclaimed Judge Lynch angrily, shaking his fist at the prisoner.

"I see we will have to put you through a course of sprouts."

"I think, judge, that we ought to use all possible means to get a confession out of this fellow," Cool Colorado observed to Doyle.

"I don't think there is the least doubt that this man belongs to a regular band of ruffians, and of course there was a reason for this desperate attack on me."

"I reckon I am getting hot on a certain party's trail, and this attack on me to-night was for the purpose of putting an end to my pursuit."

"It is important for me to learn the truth, and, under the circumstances, as I and my friend were the men attacked, I suppose there will not be any objection to sparing this scoundrel's life, provided he makes a full confession and tells all he knows about the band, to which I am sure he belongs?"

"Well, I reckon, Colorado, that is a leetle too weighty a matter for me to settle off-hand," Tommy Doyle replied, after a moment's thought.

"I reckon I will have to get the sentiments of the crowd on that p'int."

"Certainly, of course."

Then Judge Lynch and the citizens withdrew to one side and discussed the matter.

At first there were some few stupid men who declared that they didn't believe in making talk with such a scoundrel as the prisoner.

In their opinion he ought to be strung right up, without even taking the trouble to go through the ceremony of a trial.

But the vast majority did not take any stock in this idea at all.

They attached great weight to Cool Colorado's words.

"If there was an organized band of outlaws in the neighborhood of Red Bluffs, as Cool Colorado supposed, then, most certainly, it was to the decided interest of the town to know all about the gang, for a well-directed band of scoundrels could do much to injure the prospects of any mining-camp in whose neighborhood they pursued their raids.

"So, after ten minutes' discussion, it was decided that Cool Colorado's wish should be granted.

The prisoner was to be promised his life if he would betray his associates.

"Hain't got none!" he replied, doggedly, when this determination was made known to him.

"You fellers are barking up the wrong tree, as I have been telling you all along!" he declared. "Thar ain't no band, nor nothing of the kind! I came inter Red Bluffs all alone, and I don't know nothing 'bout the other chaps who were mixed up in the fight at all."

"Oh, yes, of course," responded Cool Colorado, sarcastically.

"And it was just by accident, too, that the four horses were tethered outside, and the pins driven down so loosely that they could be pulled up the moment the horses started!"

"It was just by accident that all three of you ran for the horses the moment you saw there was a chance of your being caught in a trap. Oh, yes, you didn't know anything about the others, of course!"

A groan of derision arose from the crowd.

"Well, stranger, I reckon we will have to try a leetle gentle persuasion upon you," Judge Lynch suggested.

"We ain't got any boiling oil or wild horses handy, and it would be a heap sight of trouble to kindle a fire, so as to give you a taste of what you will meet in the other world, but that's some stout trees right near, branches which will make the nicest kind of switches, and I reckon some of the boys will take a heap of pleasure in giving you what Paddy gave the drum."

There was a grin of delight upon the faces of all the bystanders as they listened to the words of Judge Lynch.

Not one was there in the crowd who did not think the punishment deserved.

But the prisoner's face grew dark with rage; he gritted his teeth together and strained at the lariat, which bound his arms, as though he thought he could burst his bands and cope, single-handed, with the miners.

"Don't ye dare to try any sich game on me!" he cried, almost frantic with rage at the idea.

"I am a bad man—jest as bad as they make 'em, and I will have the heart's blood of every galoot that dares to lay a hand upon me!"

"Curse you for a set of cowards!" he cried. "I am one man against the town, or else you wouldn't dare to think of sich a thing."

"You are all skeered to give me a chance for my life."

"I'm a rustler from Rustlerville if I only have half a chance."

"You don't dare, you miserable set of cowards, to pick out a man to meet me in a fair fight, and I don't ax no odds either, 'bout the weapons; anything will suit me from revolvers down to fists, for I can lay out any man in this hyer camp in a fair fight!"

It was a bold defense, and as the fellow was a well-built, muscular man, it seemed as if he would prove a troublesome customer for any ordinary man to encounter.

But in the camp of Red Bluffs, there were now two men who, by their deeds, had proved their right to rank as fighters of renown, the two scout-pards, Cool Colorado and Sioux Sam.

During the delivery of the bold defiance, Cool Colorado had noted the expression upon the face of his brother scout, and long experience had enabled him to guess at the thoughts excited in the mind of the other by the bold challenge.

Laying his hand upon Sioux Sam's arm the moment the ruffian finished the speech, he said: "Let me attend to this fellow, and I will do as much for you some time."

"All right!" Sioux Sam replied, immediately. "Go in, and climb the fellow and see if you can't knock some sense into his thick head!"

"Fellow-citizens, this man has thrown out a pretty big dare!" Cool Colorado exclaimed, addressing the crowd, "and, if you haven't any objections, I would like to take him up."

There was a general hum of astonishment at this announcement, for the ruffian was a bigger man, apparently, in every way than the young scout.

There was little difference, though, in their sizes, the scout being really a few pounds the heavier man.

But, being so well proportioned, he did not appear to be as big as he actually was, while the road-agent, a large-boned, loosely put together fellow, presented an appearance quite deceptive.

"As this fellow is so anxious for a fair shake, I feel like giving it to him, if it is agreeable to you, fellow-citizens," Cool Colorado continued. "I will meet him without weapons in a fair fist fight, and if I whip him to a stand-still, then he is to reveal the secrets of the gang to which he belongs."

"That's a bargain!" cried the man, eager to embrace the opportunity.

"And if I lay you out, I am to be allowed to git up and git!"

"Yes, that is satisfactory to me if it is to the rest," the scout declared.

Judge Lynch shook his head, and his example was followed by a good many of the crowd.

"It 'pears to me, Colorado, that you are giving this cuss the hull butt-end of the bargain!" Tommy Doyle exclaimed.

"Talk 'bout gitting a fair show! Durn me if he don't want everything his own way!"

"No, I don't!" growled the ruffian.

"Why, ain't it as fair for him as it is for me? Hain't we 'bout the same size? Mebbe, I am a leetle the biggest, and then ag'in I am the oldest, and, I reckon, I have been through a heap more than he has, so it's a pretty even thing."

"Oh, give the man a show, judge!" cried Sioux Sam.

"If Colorado can't get all the satisfaction out of his hide that Red Bluffs wants, then the camp must be a pretty hard one to satisfy."

"Yes; I don't want to boast, but I reckon that after the skirmish is over he will regret that he didn't allow himself to be tied up to a tree and take his thrashing like a man."

This confident declaration enraged the ruffian.

"Oh, don't you talk!" he cried. "You are a pretty good-looking young rooster now, but after I get through with you I reckon you will know more, but you won't be half so handsome."

By this time the appetite of the miners had been whetted for the fray, and a universal cry went up:

"Let 'em go at it!"

"All right, gentlemen, if that is the say-so. I am perfectly agreeable," Judge Lynch remarked. "Far be it from me to spoil the fun. Untie the man! And, stranger, let me caution you not to try any gum game. You are going to have the fairest kind of a show, and you must come up squarely to the mark!"

"If you try to cut and run we will riddle you with bullets!"

"Oh, don't you be afraid," the prisoner rejoined, some of the miners busy in removing the lariat which bound his arms.

"You are going to treat me squar', and I'll give you the best show for your money that you ever saw."

"You wasn't wise to chip into this hyar game!" he called out to Cool Colorado, "for I am the best fist-fighter that thar is in this dees-trict!"

"I have laid out more men than I have fingers and toes, and I never was whipped in a fair fight yet."

"That is a boast which you will not be able to make after the little skirmish is over," the young plainsman rejoined.

"Time!" yelled an impatient miner.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CLEW.

THE lariat was removed, and the ruffian stepped forward.

He wore no coat, and being bare-headed, having lost his hat when pitched so unceremoniously from the back of his horse, was in good trim for the contest.

All the preparation that Cool Colorado made was to cast aside his broad-brimmed slouch hat.

Thanks to the bright moon, there was plenty of light for the contest, for all objects were almost as visible as by day.

"Are you ready?" asked Arkansaw Bill, striking an attitude, with his brawny fists raised to the level of his breast, evidently preparing for a desperate rush.

"I am ready! Let her go, Gallagher!"

The scout had thrown himself into an easy, graceful position, his left foot slightly advanced, and his hands just above the line of his waist.

The spectators bent forward in eager expectancy, anxious not to miss a single incident of the contest.

The moment the words left Cool Colorado's lips Arkansaw Bill made a rush at him.

All of the road-agent's experience had been gained in what is known as rough-and-tumble fighting; the tactics of the regular ring-fighter he knew nothing whatever about.

His idea was to close in with his adversary as soon as possible, and then bring him to the ground.

Now, although there hadn't been anything said in regard to the nature of the fight, except that it was to be with fists, yet Cool Colorado had made up his mind not to have any rough-and-tumble business in "his'n," to use the old expression.

So, when Arkansaw Bill rushed at him with all the mad fury of the buffalo-bull, the scout, with a nimbleness that no one gave him credit for possessing, slipped under the arm of the other, and as Arkansaw Bill, baffled by this dodge, clumsily attempted to turn, Cool Colorado, measuring the distance with all the skill of a practiced boxer, hit his opponent a terrific blow on the neck, just under the ear, which sent Arkansaw Bill to "grass" in short order.

A cry of astonishment rose on the air.

Few men in the assemblage had ever seen such a tremendous blow struck before.

It was fully two minutes before Arkansaw Bill came to "time," and then he approached Cool Colorado in an uncertain way, as if he didn't exactly know what to make of him.

The man was bewildered by the stroke, but was game enough to continue the fight.

Having no experience to warn him to the contrary, he was of the opinion that the blow was an accidental one, and had not the slightest suspicion that teaching and practice made such a stroke possible.

"You've got your man rattled—go in and settle him!" advised Sioux Sam in Cool Colorado's ear, as the experienced eyes of the plainsman noticed the expression upon the face of the ruffian when he rose slowly to his feet.

As Arkansaw Bill faced his opponent again, he hadn't a clear idea of what he should do.

His first attempt in rushing his foe down had resulted so disastrously that he did not feel like trying it on again.

But scant time was afforded him to deliberate, for as soon as he came fairly up to the "scratch," Cool Colorado attacked him with the fury of a tiger.

Arkansaw Bill could no more ward off the deftly-aimed strokes than he could fly.

Crack! crack! the ponderous blows alighted on his body, and then, almost before he knew how it happened, he found himself flat on his

back, having been beaten down with a blow which, landing right between the eyes, caused him to see more stars than he had ever witnessed in the heavens.

The man was game, though, and a third time he rose and renewed the fight.

As before, the fists of his opponent played the devil's tattoo all over his chest and face until he was sick and sore.

Rendered desperate by the pain of his bruises, he essayed to close in with his agile antagonist, and this time he succeeded.

Little benefit was it, though, for Cool Colorado was fully as expert in wrestling as in the use of his fists, and then, to the utter astonishment of Arkansaw Bill, when he came to close quarters with his antagonist, he made the discovery that the scout was a far stronger man than he.

A few moments the two struggled over the turf, and then in some peculiar way Cool Colorado got a certain grip on his opponent, and then Arkansaw Bill was turned upside down, and thrown to the earth with a force which stunned him.

He had been "cross-buttocked."

The man laid so still that for a moment the crowd jumped to the conclusion that he had been killed by the fall.

"Is he dead, do you think?" asked Tommy Doyle, voicing the curiosity of the crowd.

"Oh, no, he has too hard a head to mind a little thing like that!" Cool Colorado observed.

The miners looked at each other.

It might be a "little thing" in the scout's opinion, but there wasn't a man in the crowd who would have been willing to allow the "little thing" to be tried upon him for a fifty-dollar slug.

It was fully three minutes before the prostrate man recovered his senses, and when he did, sat up and looked around him, it was plain from the expression upon his face that he had got all the fighting he desired.

"Time!" yelled one of the miners in derision.

"Shut yer yawp!" exclaimed Judge Lynch. "If you war in his place you wouldn't be so eager to yell time!"

Arkansaw Bill rose slowly to his feet.

"No more in mine," he remarked. "I've got all I want. I thought I knew something 'bout fighting, and was entitled to consider myself a bad man from Badville, but now I cave right in. I'm sore from the crown of my head to the sole of my foot, and I believe I am black and blue all over."

"You have got enough?"

"Durn sight more than enuff!" growled the road-agent.

"You remember the agreement?"

"Oh, yes, and I will live up to it like a man," the fellow replied.

"Somebody ought to take a club to me, though, for not giving the thing away before I got pounded half to death."

"You are right 'bout the gang; it was a put-up job to lay you out."

"All right! Never mind the particulars now; Judge Lynch, I reckon, would like to hear the yarn in private," Cool Colorado interrupted.

With his usual caution, the scout had reflected that there might be some spy of the outlaw band in the town, and present, a witness to the scene.

To the hotel went the two scouts, Judge Lynch and the prisoner, and there, in a private room, from which the crowd was barred, much to their disgust, Arkansaw Bill told all he knew.

He had not been fully trusted with the plans of Old Nick and Dublin Mike, both of whom had been his partners in crime in former years, but he was able to tell of the capture of the girl and her confinement in the lonely ranch upon the mountain-side in the heart of the Bad Lands.

An hour afterward, the two scouts with four well-armed volunteers were on the trail.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

Two more angry and disgusted men than the two outlaws, as they rode on through the night toward their lonely ranch, never drew breath in Colorado.

"Durn me, if we hain't had the worst kind of luck!" Dublin Mike declared.

"Yes, there isn't much doubt about that," Old Nick replied.

"We didn't succeed in wiping out the bloodhounds, and we have lost two of the best men for our road-agent business that I knew of in the West."

"Do you suppose they both cashed their checks?"

"Oh, yes; they are probably being assigned warm apartments down below about this time," Nick Spader remarked, grimly.

"I thought, mebbe, that Arkansaw Bill might not be much hurt."

"I saw him throw up his hands just as his horse went down, as if he had got a bullet right through the heart. You know there was a perfect shower of lead around us at that time."

"Yes, it rained bullets!"

"I don't think there is a doubt that he was wounded, and mortally, too, and the tumble from his horse would be enough to break his neck, anyway."

"Well, what I was thinking was that if either one of them was captured they might blow the gaff on us, let out, you know, about our ranch hyer, and give away the capture of the girl."

"There might be danger of that, of course, but hardly with two such men as our fellows."

"They know that it is Old Nick's boast that he never deserts a pal who is in danger, and many a man of my gang have I rescued from the hands of the miners when it looked as if nothing short of a miracle would save their necks from hempen neckties."

"If you thought there was any danger, it might be well for us to change our location," Dublin Mike observed, shrewdly.

"It is always best to be on the safe side, of course," Nick Spader observed, reflectively.

"I guess we had better seek other quarters tomorrow. I know another ranch, about five miles off, but it is nothing but an old ruin; it will afford us shelter, though, until we can find out how things are in Red Bluffs.

"If both of our men have crossed the range, as I believe, there will not be any danger of a discovery, and we can come back; but as you say, it is always better to be safe."

"How is your wound?"

"Hurts like blazes!"

"I am afraid it is a serious one."

"Yes, I am bleeding like a stuck pig."

"Hadn't you better let me see if I can't bandage it?" Dublin Mike asked.

"We can afford to stop for a while now; there's no danger of a pursuit even if the miners had good horses, for it would puzzle a red-skin to follow our trail to-night."

"All right! pull up."

They halted, and Dublin Mike, who, by reason of the wild life he had led had managed to pick up considerable knowledge in regard to the treatment of wounds, examined the hurt which his pard had received.

"Tain't anything dangerous, though it will be a nasty sore for some time," Dublin Mike remarked, as he bandaged the hurt.

After this episode the two resumed their onward progress.

In due time they arrived at the lonely ranch.

The sentinel was on duty and reported that no incident had marked the night's watch.

The Ute princess was in her apartment, the door fastened with stout padlock on the outside, and even if it had been possible for the girl to escape from her place of confinement, there wasn't a nook on the ledge where she could have found concealment from the gaze of the sentinel, and she could not possibly have gone down the trail without almost stepping on him.

The pards retired to the vacant apartment of the cabin, leaving the sentinel still on guard, lit a candle and helped themselves to some refreshments chiefly consisting of whisky.

After this was done the two conversed together in regard to projects for the future for about an hour when a sudden idea came to Nick Spader.

"I say, Mike, we are going to have a deal of trouble with the red queen, I am afraid!" he exclaimed, abruptly.

"Not a doubt of it!"

"What is the use of fooling with her?"

"Not much, that's a fact."

"This little scheme of ours to get the secret of the Hidden Mine out of her by means of playing upon her love for Sioux Sam is going to be a total failure."

"It looks like it."

"Why wait any longer—why not try now and see if we can't frighten the secret out of her?"

"It will be a hard job."

"No doubt about that, but I have made up my mind; she will either yield the secret or we'll kill her by inches!"

Fierce was the tone in which the ruthless outlaw spoke.

"Well, one red gal, more or less won't make much difference in this hyer world," Dublin Mike remarked with the air of a philosopher.

"Goodness knows that's a heap sight more redskins in existence now than there is any need of."

"True as gospel, old man! I'll do it, and right away, too!" the outlaw chief declared, jumping to his feet.

Taking the candle they proceeded to the apartment where the girl was confined.

She had been lying upon the couch of pine-boughs but rose to a sitting posture as they entered.

The outlaws, angered by the defeat which they had experienced, lost no time in coming directly to the point.

"Have you made up your mind to reveal to us the secret of the Hidden Mine?" Nick Spader demanded, glowering upon the girl in his angriest way.

"How many times must I tell you that the tale is a fable and that no such thing exists?" the girl replied, perfectly composed, although her quick instinct told her that an hour of peril was at hand.

"Oh, I am tired of bandying words with you about this matter," Old Nick declared.

"I have given you ample time now to reflect about it."

"Tell us the secret of the mine and we will let you go free—ay, you can join your lover, Sioux Sam, who is now in Red Bluffs wondering why you do not come."

"This man here," and he nodded to Dublin Mike, "has told me about your love scrape and he has concluded to go in with me on this mine business."

"Come, you had better out with the truth."

"Yes, and then you kin go to Sioux Sam," added Dublin Mike, persuasively.

The girl did not believe a single word that was said in regard to the young scout, but she was wise enough not to admit the fact.

She contented herself with repeating her former statement that she had nothing to disclose.

"Ah, you are determined to be obstinate, then!" cried Old Nick, infuriated by the refusal.

"I must use harsh measures—I will put you to such torture that in your agony you will call aloud on death to come and release you from your torments."

"You red-skins boast of your courage and I will give you a chance to make good the vaunt of your nation."

"And in the beginning I will knock you senseless with the butt of my revolver so we can prepare you for the torture without being troubled by your struggles!"

He drew the weapon from his belt while the girl retreated to the furthest end of the apartment.

She was helpless in the power of two men more savage than any red buck that ever tortured a helpless prisoner.

But heaven did not deign that the helpless red maid should fall the prey of these ruthless villains.

As they advanced, a shout of alarm came from the lips of the sentinel without.

"Are we surprised?" cried Old Nick, and then he and Dublin Mike, revolvers in hand, rushed into the open air.

They rushed to their death, for ere they burst through the door they were met by a well-directed volley of shots and down they sunk writhing in their gore.

Two of the worst ruffians that ever disgraced the annals of Colorado had gone to the long home.

The sentinel, not expecting danger, had been surprised at his post, and the shout of alarm had not escaped from his lips until he found himself in the grasp of the foe who had crept upon him unawares with all the caution of the wild-cat.

As the reader has doubtless guessed, the rescuers who had come in the very nick of time were the two scouts, Cool Colorado, and Sioux Sam, and their miner friends.

The Snow White Dove, crouching in the rear of the apartment, had not been harmed by the bullets which had slain the two outlaws.

She came forward when the scouts entered the apartment, and fell fainting into the arms of the man she loved.

And Sioux Sam, looking down upon the beautiful face of the half-breed, suddenly came to the conclusion that he loved her to distraction.

Reader, our tale is told.

Whether the princess ever told the secret of the Hidden Mine to her husband, if such a thing really exists, is a mystery, but one fact is certain, Sioux Sam has gone into stock raising, prospers wonderfully, and seems to have plenty of money.

Perhaps it is the Ute's gold which aids him.

THE END.

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